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Doctoral thesis, University of York.

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THE USE OF FUTURE FICTIONAL TIME IN
NOVELS FOR YOUNG READERS

KAY SAMBELL

DPHIL

THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND RELATED LITERATURE

MARCH 1996

ABSTRACT

This study explores a new genre of futuristic literature for teenagers. It demonstrates that it has mainly developed along dystopian lines, which, like Nineteen Eighty-Four and Brave New World, extrapolate from present trends to predict horrifyingly credible versions of the future. It considers the features which set a children's dystopian novel apart from these classic 'adult' dystopias, and particularly focuses upon the question of imaginative closure and the ways in which the didacticism is carried in cautionary near-future realism.

The work takes a novel approach by exploring writers' imaginative use of evolutionary theory. Chapter 1 demonstrates that the perceived responsibility to point young readers to a better world exerts a powerful influence on the literature produced, making it very difficult to produce a wholly negative, ironic work. Chapter 2 shows, however, that writers have repudiated The Chrysalids' narrative tactics, at least at surface levels. Few depict Wyndham's reading of evolution, which is unequivocally used to envisage the radical improvement of the human species. They attempt instead to introduce ambiguity into the text's presentation of human nature.

The following two chapters show that, although children's writers frequently seek to use evolution as a moral metaphor, simultaneously expressing the hope that man can change, *and* warning against the dire consequences if he does not, the emphasis they have placed upon predictive realism, rather than Wyndham's speculative fantasy, counteracts their effort to articulate hope for a young reader. Huxley, Orwell and Golding all use extinction to carry their warning. A comparison with children's texts reveals that whereas 'adult' dystopian writers present hope indirectly and ironically, children's writers typically supply hope within the text itself. The tendency to present child protagonists as evolutionary agents of heroic transformation in the dystopian context results in the imaginative and ideological fracture which characterises the literature. The premises of the dystopian context make such a hope seem naively unrealistic and simplistically conceived.

Chapter 5 documents the few futuristic books in which the expression of moral meaning takes a different literary guise. Man is seen in relation to the environment, rather than embattled against society. The imaginative emphasis is upon speculation, rather than prediction, extensively employing the techniques of fantasy and the marvellous to discover new angles of perception. A Wizard of Earthsea is used to illuminate the tactics of the 'ambiguous utopia', which leaves room not only for the moral evolution of the protagonist, but also allows the best (as well as the worst) in human nature to become credible possibilities.

The Conclusion draws together the ways in which children's authors organise their narratives to try to overcome the creative dilemmas of producing dystopian fiction for an immature audience. In particular it highlights the possibilities of a new style of didacticism, which is based upon the notion of empowering the reader as an active, transformational ideologist, rather than a passive recipient of a mandated meaning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Declaration	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	19
The Creative Dilemma of Writing for Children: an Investigation into the Pressures Brought to Bear on the Children's Author	
CHAPTER 2	56
Establishing the Trend for Plausibility and Pessimism: Revising <u>The Chrysalids</u> ' View of Evolution and Necessity	
CHAPTER 3	97
Conditioned Worlds and the Extinction of the Hero: the Effects of Compromising the Premises of <u>Nineteen Eighty-Four</u> and <u>Brave New World</u>	
CHAPTER 4	139
The Defects of Human Nature and the Search For 'Homo Moralis': Versions of <u>Lord of the Flies</u>	
CHAPTER 5	175
New Angles of Perception in the Ambiguous Utopia: Adopting the Narrative Strategies of <u>A Wizard of Earthsea</u>	
CONCLUSION	212
BIBLIOGRAPHY	228

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Peter Hollindale, for his advice and encouragement during the course of this research. In addition, I would like to thank Professor Ian Lister for his unfailing support.

I am grateful to Liz McDowell and my colleagues in the Educational Development Service at the University of Northumbria for their assistance and encouragement.

I would like to acknowledge the considerable help I have received from my parents, Toni and Roy Boyer, and, above all, from my husband, Alistair.

DECLARATION

This thesis describes work undertaken solely by the author. Some of the work discussed in the thesis has also been published in the following article:

K. Sambell, 'Re-evaluating the feminine: Peter Dickinson's *A Bone From A Dry Sea*' The Use of English 47, No.1, Autumn 1995 pp.32-41.

INTRODUCTION

During the course of this thesis I aim to consider a new genre of futuristic fiction for children, more specifically for teenagers, which has emerged since the late 1960s. This literature contains well over a hundred novels (a sample of which is attached in the bibliography). The immense popularity of this form (from the author's point of view) shows little signs of abating, and the list steadily lengthens each year. Its contributors include a number of highly acclaimed children's writers, such as Virginia Hamilton, Peter Dickinson and Jill Paton Walsh, all of whom have worked successfully within other areas of children's fiction. The books are written in English and form an international literature. They are mainly produced in the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Australia, although a few works are European, and have been made widely available in translation.

I do not intend to document all of the books which fall within this literature, but aim to cover sufficient numbers to demonstrate that there is a coherent literature of the future for young readers, and during the course of the thesis I will consider the features which characterise it. These are speculative works, the bulk of which are anxiety fantasies, in which authors express grave fears for the future of the young people to whom the books are addressed. The key characteristics of the literature are less likely to be in terms of setting, characterisation, plot and so on, but in terms of the questions the literature seeks to raise for its readership. What interests me is the fact that futuristic fiction specifically addressed to a young audience has largely developed along dystopian lines, and I aim to consider what sets a children's dystopia apart from an adult book which is working in the same vein.

As I will show in Chapter 1, although individuals stand in different positions in relation to the question of whether a children's book should offer happiness, the perceived responsibility to point young readers toward a better world exerts a powerful influence on the literature produced, making it very difficult to create a wholly negative, pessimistic work. This in turn raises fascinating questions, such as the types of imaginative closure which are deemed appropriate in the children's novel. This is a key focus for my study. Relatedly, my other main area of interest is the question of didacticism, and I will examine how writers arrange their narratives to express their moral meaning for an intended non-

peer, immature audience. Without wishing to undervalue the literature in the slightest way, I believe that writers pose themselves immense tactical dilemmas by choosing prophetic forms of story which emphasise prediction and plausibility by projecting realism into the near-future.

If the dystopia presents the 'adult' writer with 'artistic problems'¹ these are considerably heightened by the ethical and educational responsibilities normally associated with writing for children. In many ways the dystopian fiction which has emerged for young readers has often been unsatisfactory, in literary and pedagogic terms.² Frequently, for example, writers seem unwilling to allow the narrative to unobtrusively carry the ideological 'message' of the dystopia, which results in unnecessarily intrusive authorial control. I will suggest that the manifest flaws in children's dystopian novels stem from an authorial fear that the admonitory purpose of the fiction will be missed or misconstrued by an unskilled and vulnerable young reader.

The books I aim to consider are often criticised and reviewed as science fiction, due to their futuristic settings.³ The term science fiction may be misleading, however, as it is often taken to mean comic-book melodrama, offering escapist tales of monsters, hostile alien invasions or bizarre technical innovations.⁴ The widespread critical aversion to science fiction in the children's book world stems from what science fiction used to be in the 1950s and 1960s. Futuristic fiction displays a dramatic departure from those days, when most of it was mediocre and banal.⁵ In 1974 John Rowe Townsend was justified in his observation that 'a good deal of poor or routine science fiction for children has appeared.'⁶ Even its better

¹Robert Scholes *Structural Fabulation* (London and Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975) p.79

²See John Stephens, 'Post-Disaster Fiction: The Problematics of a Genre', *Papers*, 3, No.3, (Dec.1992), pp.126-130; Peter Hollindale, 'The Darkening of the Green', *Signal* 61, (Jan. 1990), pp.3-19.

³ See T. Botten, S. Hayes, and V. Ray, 'Fiction for Children: Symposium on Science Fiction', *CLE*, 14, No. 4, (1983) pp.222-236.; Sylvia Engdahl, 'The Changing Role of Science Fiction in Children's Literature', in V. Haviland, ed. *Children's Literature: Views and Reviews*, (London: Bodley Head, 1973) pp.250-255; Margaret Esmonde, 'After Armageddon: the Post-Cataclysmic Novel for Young Readers', *Child L*, 6, (1977), pp. 211-220; Virginia Haviland, 'A Second Golden Age? In a Time of Flood', *Horn Book*, 19, (Aug. 1971), pp.409-419.

⁴Jay Williams, John Christopher: Allegorical Historian. *Signal* 4, (1971). pp.18-23

⁵ Sylvia Engdahl, 'The Changing Role of Science Fiction' p.452.

⁶ *Written for Children*. (London: Garnet Miller, 1965; revised edition Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1974), p.218. See also Sheila Egoff, 'Science Fiction' in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature* eds.Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F., (OUP, 1969), pp.388; Hugh and Maureen Crago, 'John Christopher: An Assessment With Reservations', *Children's Book Review* (1971), pp.77-79.

practitioners, like A. Norton and R. Heinlein, replicated the simple adventure story in whimsical and clichéd space settings, often to ludicrously implausible effect. As Glazer points out, in Heinlein's Farmer in the Sky, (1950) for example, a child plugs a hole in the side of his space ship with his Boy Scout uniform.⁷ The emphasis was on futuristic paraphernalia, rather than using the fictional future to probe moral and philosophical concerns.⁸ By 1969 Egoff could still write

There is as yet no novel in the field that welds scientific fact and/or sociological speculation with strong literary qualities to give it universal appeal.⁹

These vacuous stories still exist,¹⁰ but what I term futuristic fiction has taken a different, much more serious direction. The predictions made by Townsend¹¹ and Hollindale¹² have been borne out: future fictional time has recently been exploited to tackle weighty themes for young readers, raising serious and searching questions about huge philosophical, technical, scientific and moral issues.¹³

With the innovative work of L'Engle and Langton in the early 1960s science fiction began to blur into fantasy, which has traditionally enjoyed a higher critical status.¹⁴ Both used the convention of time-travel to the future, which enables a child-protagonist to return to the present and choose a better alternative route. In Langton's The Diamond in the Window¹⁵ and L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time¹⁶ the divisions between good and evil are clearly signalled for an implied child-audience. There is never any question that the child heroes and heroines, and the author themselves, are all on the side of the angels.¹⁷ L'Engle's work is a Christian allegory, and Langton's unequivocally extols the virtues of American Independence. Their tone of confidence is supreme.

⁷ Joan Glazer and Gurney Williams, An Introduction to Child Literature, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979) p.280.

⁸ See Roberts, Thomas J. 'Science Fiction and the Adolescent', Child L, 2, (1973), pp.87-91.

⁹ 'Science Fiction', p.390.

¹⁰ See, for example, Redmond Wallis, The Mills of Space (London: MacDonald Children's Books, 1989)

¹¹ John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children, p. 213.

¹² Peter Hollindale, Choosing Books For Children, (London: Elek, 1974) p.100.

¹³ *ibid.* p101. See also Engdahl, 'The Changing Role of Science Fiction', p.256.

¹⁴ See Stephens, 'Post-Disaster Fiction', p.126.; John Stephens, Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction (London: Longman, 1992) cited by Peter Hunt, Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) p.78.

¹⁵ Jane Langton, The Diamond in the Window (New York: Harper, 1962)

¹⁶ Madeleine L'Engle, A Wrinkle in Time (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1962)

¹⁷ Townsend, 'Didacticism in Modern Dress', p.38.

From the late 1960s onwards, a note of doubt began to sound in futuristic fiction. Anxiety fantasies were produced in prolific numbers.¹⁸ Works for the young began to make serious and disturbing comment upon the direction of human civilisation, questioning just what humanity would look like were it to achieve its ideological ambitions. By 1982 Pohl could claim that, in terms of themes and issues, there was little discernible difference between the science fiction produced for adults and children.¹⁹

Often children's writers' hypotheses about humankind's likely lines of development resulted in biting criticism and vehement social comment. In short, the literature of the future became deeply serious and troubled, often prompting commentators to regard it as a literature in its own right. Hunt, for example, observed of Dickinson's 'Changes' Trilogy

These books are part of a large genre in children's publishing, not so much science fiction as future-speculation.²⁰

During the 1970s and on to the present day a dark literature of emergency and despair developed. Dystopian scenarios proliferated, expressing deep-rooted fears for the future of those children being addressed.²¹ The future imaginative landscapes were hugely undesirable, even in the early works of Dickinson and Christopher, whose pioneering writing I will fully consider in Chapter 2. As the literature developed, the future scenarios that writers envisaged became increasingly intolerable, presenting a variety of repressive and invasive tyrannically controlled States, whether these were conceived as being neo-primitive or hyper-technological by nature.²² In the 1980s devastatingly bleak visions of the horrifying aftermath of nuclear war emerged.²³ What MacLeod²⁴ could describe as an 'undercurrent' of

¹⁸ See Elaine Moss, 'The Seventies in British Children's Books' in The Signal Approach to Children's Books, ed. N. Chambers, (London: Bodley Head, 1980) p.62.; Madeleine L'Engle, 'Childlike Wonder and the Truths of Science Fiction', Child L., 10, (1982) p.102.

¹⁹ Frederick Pohl, 'Science Fiction for the Young (At Heart)', Child L., 10, (1982), pp.111-112

²⁰ Peter Hunt, Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p.142.

²¹ See Janice Alberghene, 'Childhood's End?', Child L. 13, (1985) p. 189.; Heather Scutter 'A Very Long Way From Billabong', Papers, 2, No.1 (1991) p.30.

²² Hollindale, 'The Darkening of the Green', p.16

²³ See M. Lenz, 'Hope Amidst the Ruins: Notes Toward a Nuclear Criticism of Young Adult Literature', Journal of Youth Services, 3, (Spring 1988), pp.321-328; Paul Brians 'Nuclear War Fiction for Young Readers: a Commentary and Annotated Bibliography', in Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War. ed. Philip Davies, (Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.132-150.

pessimism in L'Engle's later time-travel fantasy, A Wind in the Door²⁵ became increasingly explicit in the nightmare scenarios imagined by later writers. Pattow²⁶ and Wehemeyer²⁷, both documenting futuristic writing in the 1970s, remarked on writers' ambivalence to the future presentation of science, politics, technology and society. By the time Hollindale alluded to futuristic books in the late 1980s, he observed that the writers were 'deeply pessimistic about the future of the planet.'²⁸ I wish to document and explore these unprecedented levels of pessimism for a young readership during the course of my thesis.

I believe it is important to recognise the quintessentially moral nature of these books which, like the novels about the Holocaust which Harrison describes, seek to instruct their readers and 'make people choose to become better than they are.'²⁹ Commentators frequently refer to futuristic literature's 'purpose' or 'function'.³⁰ This function is usually perceived to be twofold. The literature primarily warns, but also counsels hope and argues for change.

The literature is predominantly regarded as a literature of warning, which primarily seeks to caution young readers about the probable consequences of current human behaviours. At the most obvious level writers warn about undesirable future political and social contexts, but at deeper levels they caution against bleak aspects of human nature itself. Stephens, for example, draws attention to the literature's admonitory function:

The purpose of the genre is to issue a warning about destructive tendencies in human behaviour.³¹

²⁴ Anne Scott MacLeod, 'Undercurrents: Pessimism in Contemporary Children's Fiction', CLE, 21, (Summer 1976) pp.96-102

²⁵ Madeleine L'Engle, A Wind in the Door. (New York: Crosswicks, 1973).

²⁶ Donald J. Pattow, 'A Critical Chronology of Speculative Fiction for Young People', unpublished doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan Univ., 1977.

²⁷ Lillian Biermann Wehemeyer, Images in a Crystal Ball: World Futures in Novels For Young People (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1981) p.32.

²⁸ 'The Darkening of the Green', p.16.

²⁹ Barbara Harrison 'Howl Like the Wolves', Child L, 15, (1987), pp. 86.

³⁰ A number of studies have focused upon varying aspects of futuristic literature. Wehemeyer's Images in a Crystal Ball and Pattow's 'A Critical Chronology' both documented American futures fiction in the 1970s, largely by outlining writers' key preoccupations. Neither took a 'literary' stance in relation to the material. Stephens' 'Post Disaster Fiction' and Scutter's work both concentrate upon Australian neo-primitive, post-cataclysmic books, and largely neglect futures which depict 'high tech' scenarios. Their approach is literary, rather bibliotherapeutic. Hollindale's 'Darkening of the Green' alludes to futuristic fiction, but sees it in a broader context: that of admonitory teenage fiction (including non-futuristic works). All these commentators perceive that these books are written primarily to convey a 'message'.

³¹ Stephens (1992) 'Post Disaster fiction', p.126.

Similarly, Hollindale observes that 'the ideological content is very near the surface' of this type of writing, and that it carries the cautionary "message" that 'humanity is dangerously at the mercy of its own political or technological artefacts.'³² Like Stephens, Hollindale goes on to add that this warning is rooted in one way of pessimistically seeing 'human nature', most specifically its

...animal characteristics...predation, greed, rapacious short-term opportunism, manic and irrational competitiveness...[These] aggressive instincts [form] a dominant behavioural pattern which [is] destructive of other life, self-destructive, and patently unsustainable beyond the trivial time scale of a few millenia or centuries. (p.9)

Primarily writers 'extrapolate from contemporary western reality to envisage a future world whose dystopic features are terrible exaggerations of the social, political and ecological present'³³ in order to warn. In so doing they attempt to fulfil the perceived needs of the generation to come.³⁴ Many adults feel that the need for children to know about the consequences of current behaviours is urgently increasing. There is considerable evidence of a growing sense of an imagined historical crisis of unprecedented proportions, which futuristic fiction has consistently sought to highlight.

Broadly speaking, recent world events have appeared to threaten the institution of childhood itself.³⁵ The threat of nuclear war, for instance, precipitated grave concerns about the future that children would inherit. Man could now conceivably damage the environment on a scale that had previously seemed unimaginable. The atom bomb, for example, had swiftly ended the ravages of a world war, raising hopes that peace and liberty were attainable, and that children could now inherit their benefits and refuse to make the same mistakes again. It also raised daunting and paralysing fears about human nature and its ability to control such lethal technology in the future. Some futuristic fiction has explicitly addressed the nuclear issue.³⁶

³²'The Darkening of the Green', p.17.

³³Scutter, 'Post Modern Versions', p.4.

³⁴See M. Lenz Nuclear Age Literature For Youth: the Quest for a Life-Affirming Ethic (Chicago and London: American Library Assoc., 1990); Hollindale, 'The Darkening of the Green', p.17.

³⁵ See Judith Plotz, 'The Disappearance of Childhood: Parent-Child Role Reversals in After the First Death and A Solitary Blue', CLE, 19, No.2, (1988), pp.67-79.; Alberghene, (1985).

³⁶See Brians, (1990.)

In recent decades seemingly unprecedented advances in science and technology have impinged on all aspects of life.³⁷ Many writers seek to raise questions about the use to which science may be put in a future political or social context. They apparently respond to widespread fears that social values and common goals are currently disintegrating.³⁸ Many describe the 'void' or 'vacuum' which young people now face.³⁹ The fear that 'the good old days have gone, and we must find a new course'⁴⁰ is commonly expressed. Prevalent fears about the future have recently been heightened by current 'addictions'⁴¹ to 'green' thinking, which has notably drawn attention to the ample evidence of humanity's economic and environmental irresponsibility⁴²

This crisis of confidence is often associated with science, or at least its ability to rapidly disseminate information about the injustices and horrors of contemporary life, which science has apparently done little to ameliorate. Egoff, for example, considers that the changing emphases in the writing and criticism of children's books in recent years are due to the fact that

...electronic advances admit us to a global village and force immediate decisions of conscience on us all...Almost every hitherto accepted idea and principle about the conduct of life is being challenged...The age of faith has passed and what is to fill the void?⁴³

Many feel that because adults no longer feel confident that they know what to advise children to ensure their future happiness, children's books can no longer offer a nostalgic

³⁷ Plotz, op.cit. p.69.

³⁸ See Sylvia Engdahl, 'Perspective on the Future: The Quest of Space Age Young People', in ed. M Lenz and R. Mahood, Young Adult Literature: Background and Criticism. Chicago: American Library Association, 1980, p.427

³⁹ See Robert Westall, 'The Vacuum and the Myth', Teenage Reading ed. Kennerley, P. London: Ward Lock, 1979, p.35.

⁴⁰ Sheila Egoff, 'Pleasures and Precepts: Changing Emphases in the Writing and Criticism of Children's Literature', in Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature eds. Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F., Oxford: (OUP, 1969), p. 433. See also Townsend, (1974) p.292.; M. Eakin 'The Changing World of Science and the Social Sciences', in Children's Literature: Views and Reviews, ed. Virginia Haviland, London: Bodley Head, 1973 p320.; Alberghene, (1985)p.189.

⁴¹ Hollindale, 'The Darkening of the Green', p.10.

⁴² See Townsend, (1974) p.292.; Elaine Moss, 'Feeding the Artist', Signal 64, (Jan 1991) p.18.

⁴³ Egoff, 'Pleasures and Precepts', p.483.

and comforting picture with impunity.⁴⁴ Chambers, whose approach is admirably level-headed amongst much that is emotive, traces this crisis of consciousness to the apparent 'incoherence' revealed by current scientific and philosophical theories, such as Darwinism and Relativity (which he believes have implications not simply for the content of children's stories, but for their form).⁴⁵

It is much easier to find evidence of fears for the future of our young within the vast amount of writing about children's books, than it is to find examples of the various anodyne futures envisaged by social theorists⁴⁶: the futurists of all political hues whom Frankel⁴⁷ has termed the 'Post-Industrial Utopians.' Writers of, and commentators on, books for the young tend to believe that scientific 'progress' is ironically more likely to result in harm, and to undermine traditionally cherished human values, than to become a benign force.

As a rule distress about the future makes the idea of a literary utopia seem a naive and 'empty dream'⁴⁸, and the term tends now to be used in a pejorative sense, implying naive escapism. As I shall describe in Chapter 1, the view prevails (amongst children's writers and critics alike) that children's needs will not be well-served by sheltering them too much from the occasionally painful truth.⁴⁹ The dystopia simply seems more realistic, given the current outlook and sensibility. In fact I have only discovered one futuristic text which could unequivocally be considered to be a utopian fiction: Vale's Albion⁵⁰, about which the publisher has written on the dust jacket

Vale has revived an English literary tradition of utopian writing too long obscured by the visions of Orwell and Huxley.

⁴⁴ibid. p.391. See also Nat Hentoff, 'Fiction For Teenagers' in Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature eds.Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F.,(Oxford: OUP, 1969), p.404.

⁴⁵Aidan Chambers 'The Child's Changing Story', Signal, 40, (1983) pp. 36-52.

⁴⁶See Karen Boyer, 'Teaching and Learning About the Future: an Exploratory Study' unpublished MA dissertation, Univ.of York, 1989.

⁴⁷Boris Frankel The Post-Industrial Utopians. Oxford: Polity Press, (1987).

⁴⁸Winifred Kaminski, trans. J.D. Stahl, 'War and Peace in Recent German Children's Literature', ChildL, 15, (1987), p.58.

⁴⁹ See Mary Steele, 'Realism, Truth and Honesty', in Children's Literature: Views and Reviews. ed. Virginia Haviland, London: Bodley Head, 1973. pp.288-297.

⁵⁰ Brenda Vale, Albion: a Romance of the Twenty-first Century, (Barnstaple: Spindlewood, 1982).

In Chapter 1 I shall also show how writers usually feel an ethical and educational responsibility toward their implied non-peer audience, which may present them with a 'creative dilemma'⁵¹. Most writers take this sense of responsibility extremely seriously, and I do not wish to suggest that there is anything purposefully gratuitous about the levels of horror and violence which pervade this grim literature of the future. The novels produced are part and parcel of the climate of belief of the times. Writers are primarily disposed to use the dystopian element of their fictions to challenge child readers, encouraging them to question and reject morally undesirable human actions. They do so by 'proving' the awful truth of their probable consequences.

I suggested earlier that warning literature is typically regarded as having a dual purpose. I write from the firm conviction that futuristic pessimism is not designed to depress or dispirit its young readers.⁵² Like all warning literature, I believe it is underpinned by the clear impulse to make people good by choice.⁵³ Futuristic books are, as Harrison says of Huxley and Orwell's dystopian fiction, 'calls of the imagination to the ethical.'⁵⁴ They use their pessimistic frame of reference to assert that, for the reader, it is not too late. Even though some writers may, at heart, seriously doubt humanity's ability to 'change its spots'⁵⁵ they frequently hope to suggest the possibility of something better in moral terms for their young readers. They are keen to ensure that readers perceive they write because they want to change the world. They are not usually content to imply hope, but try to structure their narratives so that hope is actually supplied in the text itself. As I will show, the predictive dystopian strategy they have chosen makes it exceptionally difficult to supply a hopeful reading within the text itself, however. Often a damaging confusion arises, or writers risk a disjunction between their didactic intention and their literary form.

I will demonstrate that, having established the bleak dystopian context, many then seek to raise the notion that the child protagonists, and/or the implied child reader, may become

⁵¹ Aidan Chambers, 'An Interview With Alan Garner', in The Signal Approach to Children's Books: A Collection, ed. N. Chambers, (London: Kestrel, 1980) p.279.

⁵² See Hollindale, 'The Darkening of the Green', p.18.

⁵³ Barbara Harrison, 'Howl Like the Wolves', Child L., 15, (1987) p.86.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p.86.

⁵⁵ Hollindale, 'Darkening of the Green', p.10.

symbols of desirable and radical change. They try to emphasise another way of looking at humanity, which values its intelligence and imagination, its capacity for love, loyalty and altruism.⁵⁶ To some degree, in my view, all the books suggest that future hope lies in Man's ability to retrace his evolutionary steps to the point at which things began to go wrong.⁵⁷ In this way writers often try to leave room for readings in which humanity may have a second chance in the narrative's future-time, not simply to behave better, but to fundamentally change. Writers seem to be experimenting with different ways of expressing change throughout the literature: attempting to re-conceptualise the human creature itself. I am particularly keen to highlight their use of the metaphor of biological evolution to suggest the possibility of analogous moral change.

As I have outlined, there is a perceived need for stories that are equal to the demands of our age, which I believe these writers are struggling to fulfil. Chambers, for example, has written

I have to say that it seems important to me, especially in writing for young people, not to submit to incoherence but to search out new patterns of coherence and ways of making stories that represent those new patterns. This indeed is the narrative problem of our time.⁵⁸

Many others feel that children and adolescents need what is often termed 'a literature of survival'.⁵⁹ Many feel strongly that, at a vulnerable period in their lives, youngsters need to encounter clear-cut guidelines and positive affirmations in their literature.⁶⁰ They suggest that books should not only 'puncture old myths and dreams'⁶¹ but should help young people to forge a new corpus of values, broadly based upon non-competitive, non-materialistic

⁵⁶ibid. p15.

⁵⁷ Such a view is considered by Rajeev Syal, who examines research which suggests that man has evolved from the peace-loving, vegetarian bonobo rather than the predatory, aggressive chimpanzee. De Waal, a Dutch animal behaviourist, postulates that we would have developed a very different idea of ourselves and our behaviour patterns had we not become accustomed to emphasising our predatory evolutionary past as 'man the hunter'.

⁵⁸ 'The Child's Changing Story', p.52. See also Engdahl, 'Perspectives on the Future', p.427.

⁵⁹ A. Silvey, 'The Literature of Survival' Horn Book Mag. 62, p285, (May 1986). See also Betty Bacon, 'From Now to 1984' in The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading, Meek, M. ed. (London: Bodley Head, 1977) pp.130-131.

⁶⁰See Bacon, 'From Now to 1984', p.131. : 'Children and adolescents need models.'

⁶¹ See Margaret Esmonde, 'After Armageddon: the Post-Cataclysmic Novel for Young Readers', Children's Literature, 6, (1977) pp. 211-220.; Kate Waters. 'For Members of the "Last Generation"?', The Horn Book, 61, 1985, pp.339-341.

principles, in which humanity reveres all life, not simply its own.⁶² Pattow, for instance, values 'generative literature...which has "survival value",⁶³ by which he seems to mean books which embody 'new moralities'⁶⁴, empowering children to change the world in the future. Lenz calls this disposition a 'search for an ethic of survival'⁶⁵. The terms she uses suggest the striking similarity between this literary 'quest' and so-called green thinking. For instance, she regards the idea of the ideal (warrior) 'hero' to be suspect, and urgently in need of redefinition along traditionally more humble, peace-loving 'feminine' lines:

Today, the...survivor figure can no longer be primarily concerned with the luxury of claiming his or her "due" as an individual in the total struggle of will set on affirming personhood. Instead, the ethic of survival in the nuclear world will demand that the heroic individual surrender certain self-aggrandizing ego claims, affirming the value and dignity of all beings-in short, express a life-affirming ethic in his or her mode of being. To express this more humble ideal, I have coined the word *biophile* to mean lover of the *bios*, or total life system...Only a person endowed with holistic vision and reverence for the totality of life on Earth can...come to a contemporary vision of paradise.⁶⁶

This strongly resembles the rhetoric of ideological revisioning which has underpinned the ecological, feminist and conservation movements in recent years. Like Lenz, they argue for new ideas and patterns of perception. They perceive contemporary problems lie in humanity's

fragmentationalist way of seeing, which reinforces, validates and inflates qualities and behaviours that we have been conditioned to regard as masculine (such as analysis, reason, assertiveness, aggression, competitiveness, exploitation, a proclivity for hierarchies, hunger for domination). Other qualities and behaviours, traditionally regarded as feminine (such as synthesis, seeing things in wholes, empathy, emotion, intuition, co-operation, active democracy, receptivity, nurturing) have been downgraded or marginalised.⁶⁷

At root their political visions require a 'revolution of Copernican proportions',⁶⁸ which amount to a whole new way of seeing ourselves and the world. But the problems associated with overthrowing, or even loosening what are perceived to be dominant paradigms of

⁶²Eakin, p.332.

⁶³ Pattow, p.144.

⁶⁴ Review in *Growing Point*, 14, (1975), p.2,820.

⁶⁵Millicent Lenz, *Nuclear Age Literature For Youth: the Quest for a Life-Affirming Ethic* (Chicago and London: American Library Assoc., 1990) p.xiv.

⁶⁶*ibid.* p.xiv.

⁶⁷ Sue Grieg at al. *Greenprints: for Changing Schools* (London: World Wildlife Fund & Kogan Page, 1989) p.12

⁶⁸*ibid.* p14.

thought⁶⁹, achieving what Suvin would call our 'defamiliarization or estrangement,'⁷⁰ should not be underestimated. Like Suvin, many commentators believe that science fiction offers the greatest possibilities in narrative terms to achieve this objective.⁷¹

My thesis will document the significant challenges which face those literary artists who seek to arrange their narratives to 'search out new patterns of coherence'⁷² for the young by concentrating upon the immense technical difficulties they face. I have already suggested that any admonitory literature confronts significant artistic difficulties. The problems to be faced are also inherently ideological, for, as Jonathon Porritt, former director of 'Friends of the Earth', has observed, it is extremely difficult to present the 'truth' of the values against which one warns

...without falling into the trap of an apocalyptic despair which merely disempowers those whom one seeks to reinvigorate.⁷³

The problems of reconciling the aim of presenting the dark truth, whilst maintaining a sharp focus upon hope, (often regarded as essential for the young) present interesting technical dilemmas which I aim to explore. I am particularly interested in the fact that these problems are exaggerated in a literature designed for a non-peer audience, especially when writers have predominantly been disposed to use the dystopian literary form. To date there has been no systematic bibliographic research into the dystopian novel for children and teenagers.

Critics of futuristic fiction for adults have often pointed out that most writers this century have been disposed to produce dystopias.⁷⁴ Like the critics of children's books, they also

⁶⁹See J.Robertson, The Sane Alternative. (Oxford: James Robertson, 1983)

⁷⁰ Quoted by Robert Scholes, Structural Fabulation: an Essay on Fiction of the Future, (Notre Dame and London: Notre Dame Univ.,1975) p.46.

⁷¹ Mark Rose, for example, argues that science fiction has the peculiar power to make things strange in Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976) ; John Griffiths asserts that science fiction deals with possibility, not fact, which enables this estrangement to take place in Three Tomorrows: American, British and Soviet Science Fiction. (London: MacMillan, 1980.) See also Patrick Parrinder, Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching. London: Methuen New Accents, 1980.

⁷² Chambers, 'Child's Changing Story', p.52.

⁷³ Irvine, S and Ponton, A. The Green Manifesto. [With a foreward by J Porritt] (London: MacDonald Optima, 1988.) p.ix.

⁷⁴See, for example Kingsley Amis New Maps of Hell. (New York: New English Library, 1967).; Mark R. Hillegas The Future as Nightmare (New York: New English Library, 1967); Chad Walsh From Utopia to Nightmare. (New York: Panther, 1962)

trace this disposition to a sense of historical emergency, which makes the idea of utopian fiction seem 'fundamentally irrational...in our fallen world.'⁷⁵ Bittner, for example, has observed that two world wars, the Soviet Gulag and Nazi death camps, the influence of dehumanizing technology and capitalist materialism, and the failure of socialist utopian experiments

had nearly killed hope..By the 1970s, the positive utopia had been displaced in the system of literary genres available to novelists..."new maps of hell" had become more numerous and more prevalent...the form available in the literary system for constructing alternate worlds had changed from utopia to nightmare...Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *1984* (1949) had evolved into the dominant genre models.⁷⁶

This has resulted in a powerful and influential literature,⁷⁷ which has, according to Griffiths, made it very difficult for any novelist to present corporate values in a positive light ⁷⁸.

In one sense it seems simplest to regard the dystopia as the complete antithesis to the utopia. Peck suggests utopian novels 'present a perfectly ordered society where all the problems of the / real world have been eliminated' ⁷⁹ and Cuddon sees the utopia as 'a place where all is well.'⁸⁰ In practice, however, clear distinctions between dystopian and utopian fiction blur, because often both are used to 'encourage the reader to reflect back upon, and question, the imperfections of the existing world.'⁸¹ Ketterer stresses that both forms rely upon the use of irony. He asserts:

The literary value... depends largely upon its satiric potential and that potential, as is well illustrated by *Gulliver's Travels*, is best realised through the creation of worlds that, as distorted mirror images of our own, are somewhat less than ideal. Dystopian fiction allows for the full expression of the satiric impulse ambiguously present in utopian fiction.⁸²

⁷⁵David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1974) p.99.

⁷⁶James Bittner, 'Chronosophy, Aesthetics, and Ethics in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*: An Ambiguous Utopia', in *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, ed.Eric Rabkin et al, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1983) p.244

⁷⁷See Scholes, p.71.

⁷⁸ Griffiths, p.87

⁷⁹John Peck and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism*. (London: MacMillan, 1984)pp.119/120.

⁸⁰J.A.Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*.(London: Andre Deutsch, 1977) p.716.

⁸¹Peck, p.120.

⁸² Ketterer, p101.

The difference between them is, then, a matter of degree, because the stasis represented by many literary utopias is, in many ways, undesirable and claustrophobic, but less noticeably so than in the dystopia. Dystopian fiction conducts its warning more forcefully and unequivocally, powerfully carrying its didacticism by negative example.

The 'adult' dystopia has developed in particular ways this century. Firstly, writers using the form have tended to extrapolate from the present-day, so that the fictions produced seem like highly plausible predictions of the shape of things to come. These versions of the future are 'tightly tied to our immediate situation in space and time'⁸³, underlining the relationship between the imaginary scenario and the current world, in an attempt to secure its didactic purpose. The plausibility of these bleak visions by 'hell's cartographers' easily imply that they are an inevitable prediction, or a 'forecast of doom.'⁸⁴

Furthermore, 'adult' dystopias have tended to emphasise the socio-political structures of the future world, and as a result have tended to raise social concerns.⁸⁵ This strategy, however, readily implies that humanity is at the mercy of its social and technological artefacts.⁸⁶

I aim to show that the 'adult' dystopia relies upon presenting a 'closed' imaginative vision of the future, which insists that, once this future path has been taken, there is absolutely no hope. Every ideal is ironically doomed within the text itself. I will use well-known examples of dystopias (namely 1984, Brave New World and Lord of the Flies) to provide a focus for my discussion in my central chapters. Each chapter will focus upon a range of narrative strategies which are used by children's dystopian writers. In each case this will be prefaced with a discussion of the key narrative strategies used by 'adult' novelists in order to carry their moral meaning. The arrangement of my chapters should not be seen as a taxonomy of the children's literature, nor as a chronological presentation of its development. There is no clearly discernible pattern emerging in children's futuristic fiction to suggest that writers are evolving particular approaches, nor is there any evidence to suggest that a particular

⁸³Scholes, p.70.

⁸⁴Cuddon, p.716.

⁸⁵Ann Swinfen, In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984.)p.190.

⁸⁶Hollindale 'Darkening of the Green', p.16.

scenario choice (along Huxley's or Orwell's lines, for example) is becoming more prevalent than any another. In fact, I have discovered that writers often present scenarios which have elements of both merged within one work. For this reason any children's text could be discussed in several chapters. I have arranged my material very broadly around basic scenario choices simply to facilitate the discussion by acting as a loose framework, rather than implying strict and discrete categories. My arrangement should not be taken to imply that subgenres exist within dystopian fiction, nor do I mean to imply that any particular 'adult' novelist has had a direct influence upon the work produced by 'children's' writers.

I must stress that the 'adult' texts are simply intended to reveal and illustrate the key *differences* between the children's dystopia and that produced for adults. Broadly speaking, children's writers are prone to compromise the narrative strategy of ironic inversion, upon which the didacticism of the 'adult' dystopia relies. The desire to point children toward a better world within the text itself means that the dystopian novel for children is a very difficult form to accomplish successfully and, without trying to devalue the literature, I wish to signal why it is often lacking in artistic and pedagogic terms.

I intend to approach the huge diversity of futuristic fiction for children from a particular standpoint. I will test the hypothesis that, consciously or subconsciously, children's writers often attribute their dystopian scenarios to fundamental flaws in human nature itself. I suggested earlier that there were two ways of viewing 'human nature.' The 'new maps of hell' which have become so central to the literary dystopia in recent years are based upon the premise that the worst side of human nature will prevail. At deep imaginative levels their future visions are perceived as a biological problem, and this leads them to an imaginative dependence on evolutionary thought.

In each chapter my discussion of 'adult' futuristic fictions will focus upon the imaginative use of evolutionary theory to act as a moral metaphor. In Chapter 2 I will use The Chrysalids to introduce the biological context of ideas, which are prominent in Wyndham's narrative. His mutation novel celebrates desirable evolutionary change, but his model is largely repudiated by children's writers. In the central chapters, 3 and 4, I will argue that the

classic dystopias depict a view of evolution acting predominantly on the level of the individual, in which the aggression and violence of individuals is favoured. This 'argument' is largely carried on the level of passive ideology in Orwell and Huxley's texts: the biological context of the ideas is submerged beneath the more prominent political and social context. In Golding's work an absolute view of 'bestial' human nature is used to counsel change. I will argue that dystopian writers take as their basic premise the supposition that if an individual is not physically stronger than another, then it will probably die. Following this line of reasoning the plausibility of their future worlds rests on the prediction that those individuals displaying the most undesirable moral characteristics (selfishness, ruthless aggression) are those most likely to be selected by the evolutionary mechanism. In contrast, those individuals displaying desirable moral characteristics (peacefulness, tolerance, altruism) are inevitably doomed. Thus the classic dystopia depicts the ironic extinction of its morally appealing protagonists to underline the consequences of the metaphorical extinction of moral beliefs. One way of viewing humanity logically excludes a more hopeful way of seeing humanity. These underlying beliefs are entirely consistent with their 'surface' ideology, or most obvious admonitory 'message.' Every narrative feature, even at the deepest imaginative levels, points to the same utterly predictable narrative conclusion. The characters displaying recognisably 'human' characteristics are inevitably doomed in the context of the book's future fictional time.

I will show how children's writers frequently compromise the ideological "message" of the dystopia by similarly relying upon this view of the evolutionary mechanism in the earliest stages of the novel, but later suggesting an alternative, radical view of evolution (and human nature) in order to supply a hopeful reading within the text itself. This often causes a fundamental fracture within the text. The passive ideology (revealed by an inspection of the evolutionary ideas within the book, and which carry the admonitory objective of the novel) is often at odds with the resolution's surface ideology and the affirmative 'message' writers often seek to raise at the end. In Chapter 1 I will provide a detailed background to my understanding of the imaginative responses to evolutionary thought which underpin my argument. I will also contextualise my argument by locating my own position within the current debate about the critical issues which exist within the field of children's literature.

Moreover, I will use this chapter to consider the pressures which are brought to bear on the children's writer.

In Chapter 2 I will draw upon the work of John Wyndham to highlight the imaginative dependence on evolutionary thought in futuristic literature and to speculate why children's writers have largely rejected his key narrative tactics. I will discuss a range of neo-primitive children's texts in this context. In Chapter 3 I will show how the basic narrative tactics underpinning 1984 and Brave New World have dominated futuristic writing for the young, but have frequently been compromised, to various effect. In Chapter 4 I will consider the tactical choices made by Golding in Lord of the Flies, and show how children's writers who similarly use the nuclear bomb as nemesis for human evil, adopt his basic strategy but then resist his imaginative resolution. In Chapter 5 I will consider the few texts which take an entirely different approach to the future, by emphasising the hugely unpredictable and fantastic far-future. In these texts the expression of moral meaning takes a different literary guise. I will discuss the children's 'high fantasy' classic A Wizard of Earthsea to argue that some writers have chosen to present 'ambiguous utopias'⁸⁷ rather than dystopias. In other words, the admonitory nature of the work is significantly diminished, and human imperfections are presented in a different light. As Griffiths observes of Le Guin's fantasies, these are 'deliberately less than perfect worlds', but are overtly optimistic, and are interesting because they are 'written at a time when most other writers [are] retreating into nihilistic pessimism'⁸⁸. I will consider the problems encountered by writers who resort to the use of magic and fantasy in the predominantly realistic dystopian novel, but primarily will draw attention to the way in which the ambiguous utopia suggests a different view of evolution, which is seen to act on populations, favouring the 'ordinary' individual's ability to co-operate and reverse life, thereby offering new angles of perception on human nature.

⁸⁷Bittner, p.244.

⁸⁸John Griffiths Three Tomorrows (London: MacMillan, 1980) p.106

CHAPTER 1

THE CREATIVE DILEMMA OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRESSURES BROUGHT TO BEAR ON THE CHILDREN'S AUTHOR

I must stress that for the purposes of this thesis I am employing a highly pragmatic definition of the children's novel. I am simply relying, like Townsend, on the fact that the books I will consider as children's works appear on the juvenile lists of a publisher.⁸⁹ I do not have the space to tackle the vexed question of what children's literature is, nor how it may be distinguished as a literary genre from 'adult' literature. Indeed, perhaps no single definition can ever exist, because, as Hunt has pointed out, any definition is controlled by its purpose.⁹⁰ It bears repeating that I have set myself the more modest task of considering the dystopian novel as it manifests itself for children as opposed to adults, and that I simply aim to illuminate key differences between the two.

In the later stages of this chapter I intend to offer a more precise definition of futuristic fiction's implied readership, signalling my own understanding of the distinct life-stage that the intended readership is anticipated to occupy. For the moment, however, I will use the terms 'child' and 'children' in the broadest possible sense, to indicate any readership which is not yet adult.⁹¹ In this sense the concept of the 'child' is intended to embrace all the developmental stages from infant to older teenager. I hope that this will serve as a working definition, and may act as a useful short-hand term as I turn to consider the broad principles which underpin the notion of children's literature.

Whilst it may be difficult to establish a single definition of children's literature, it does seem important to outline the range of opinion held by writers, critics and other commentators, concerning what children's books should offer, because what I intend to do in remaining chapters is to demonstrate the ways in which these opinions manifest themselves in dystopian literature produced for the young. The various ways in which children are frequently regarded as an idiosyncratic audience are likely to have a considerable bearing upon what Hunt has termed the 'poetics' or 'critical grammar' of children's literature.⁹²

⁸⁹ John Rowe Townsend, *A Sense of Story* (London: Longman, 1971) p.10.

⁹⁰ Hunt, *Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature*, p.42.

⁹¹ This definition is used by Plotz, p. 68, who sees a child as 'a cultural being, based on the idea of protection.' Plotz, Judith. 'The Disappearance of Childhood: Parent-Child Role Reversals in *After the First Death* and *A Solitary Blue*', *CLE*, 19, No.2, 1988, pp.67-79

⁹² Hunt, *Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature*, p.156.

Studies of the history of children's literature reveal that the genesis and development of writing for children is deeply and uniquely rooted in the education system.⁹³ Avery⁹⁴ has argued that children's texts have repeatedly mirrored a constantly shifting moral pattern, and have always been disposed to reflect the values to which adults hope children will aspire in any given age. The didactic and moralising nature of the earliest works continues to shape and motivate contemporary writing for the young, although today it has been largely absorbed into the characterisation, narration and plotting.⁹⁵

Children's texts are routinely regarded as having a role in the social formation of children. The children's text is habitually regarded as the site for the reproduction of traditionally upheld or corporate social values. One outcome tends to be that children's books are traditionally conservative⁹⁶ and are inclined to present the 'status quo' of the 'establishment.'⁹⁷ Higonnet asserts

Children's literature is an imperialist form: its ideological functions of social control have become a routine topic...the images and themes overtly serve processes of social dominance...obviously...but also indirectly.⁹⁸

If this is true, then perhaps it is attributable, at least in part, to the unique publishing and production circumstances of children's books. Townsend⁹⁹ and Hunt¹⁰⁰ both argue that publishing for children is governed by complex social-institutional-economic equations which replace the law of supply and demand with a host of pressure groups (including 'practitioners' concerned with the welfare of children: librarians, teachers, parents and so on) all of whom exert a 'powerful influence on what the literature can and will become.'¹⁰¹ These adults may 'demand values of authors...who are directed towards producing acceptable work...' claims Townsend,

⁹³Wilkie, p.4.

⁹⁴Gillian Avery, *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction 1770-1950* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979)

⁹⁵See Townsend, 'Didacticism in Modern Dress', p.33. See also Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, (London: MacMillan, 1984) and Barbara Wall, *The Narrator's Voice* (London:MacMillan, 1991)

⁹⁶ Chambers, 'Reader in the Book', p.275.

⁹⁷See Robert Westall 'How Real Do You Want Your Realism?'

⁹⁸ Margaret Higonnet, 'Narrative Fractures and Fragments' *Child.L.* , 15, (1987)p.37.

⁹⁹'Didacticism in Modern Dress' p.36.

¹⁰⁰*Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature*, pp.155-174.

¹⁰¹*ibid.* p.83.

...the adults are uniquely able to procure on the child's behalf...the thing they feel he ought to have...

...What the child ought to have is apt to be something that fits in with the image of our society as serious, well-meaning, conscientious people feel it ought to be ... in which everybody is thoughtful, gentle, compassionate ...integrated but nevertheless individual. We expect, consciously or otherwise, that writers for children will provide us with instruments for bringing this society into being...we can practically insist upon it. (p.36)

As a result children's literature is often seen to be characterised by a tendency to uphold or cherish certain basic humane 'tenets,' such as altruism, loyalty and co-operation.¹⁰² It is frequently heavily influenced by a 'humanistic grand master narrative'¹⁰³ and its most important ideological 'message' is often taken to be the need to adjust to 'reality' or to 'accept one's' lot.¹⁰⁴ It also tends to be extremely conservative in both form and content.¹⁰⁵ Nodelman¹⁰⁶ has observed that children's books often display remarkable similarities in their central cores of meaning and narrative patterns, exhibiting an 'apparent sameness' in which authors seem to be continuously fascinated 'with the same sets of opposite ideas and their resolution and with recurring situations.'¹⁰⁷ In children's literature basic conventions are typically closely observed. McDowell¹⁰⁸ professes, for example, that children's books have a clear-cut moral schematism, use child-oriented language, often ignore probability, are usually lacking in description and introspection, tend toward optimism, habitually employ the happy ending, typically draw upon magic, fantasy, adventure and manifest an undetailed simplicity. McDowell's observations are much quoted, and up to a point they may be true, although they suggest a strict differentiation between books for children and adults which is simplistically conceived, and in fact tend to 'describe the least deviant... elements of children's texts.'¹⁰⁹

Children's literature, and those who deal with it, have a tendency to be highly conscious of the political inequality between adult producers, arbitrators and administrators and the intended child audience. Many commentators place considerable emphasis upon the

¹⁰²Sarah Greenleaf, 'The Beast Within', CLE 23, No.1, (March 1992) p.50.

¹⁰³Stephens, 'Post Disaster Fiction', p.129.

¹⁰⁴Perry Nodelman, 'Doing Violence to Conventions', Child.L., 15, (1987) p19. See also Stephens, op.cit.

¹⁰⁵Nodelman, p.19.; Higonnet, p.37.

¹⁰⁶Perry Nodelman, 'Interpretation and the Apparent Sameness of Children's Novels', Studies in the Literary Imagination, 18 (1985) ed. Hugh Keenan, pp.5-20.

¹⁰⁷Hugh Keenan. Introduction to Studies in the Literary Imagination, 18 (1985) p.1.

¹⁰⁸Myles McDowell. 'Fiction for Children and Adults: Some Essential Differences', CLE, 10, (1973) pp.50-53.

¹⁰⁹Hunt, Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature, p.63.

educational dimension of the literature, which may, as Higgins¹¹⁰ suggests, be due to a distinction which is commonly drawn between the predicted reading competencies and life experiences of children as opposed to adults. Children are frequently thought to be more readily influenced by what they read than adults, and are often believed to see that

all books are books of divination, telling us about the future, and like the fortune teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water they influence the future.¹¹¹

This essential difference between adults and children in turn raises the crucial 'question of formativeness'¹¹² and may lead to the widely held assumption that the children's writer has an important role to play in the development of the (imaginary) child being addressed.¹¹³ Many people, at least to some extent, see children's books 'not just *in* education, but *as* education' in their own right.¹¹⁴

The idea that the adult may, consciously or unconsciously, shape the views of the impressionable child has led to widespread demands that children's authors exercise a 'sense of responsibility'.¹¹⁵ Often authors (and critics) are perceived to be acting in the role of parent or 'guardian'¹¹⁶ or are seen to occupy the position of schoolmaster or teacher¹¹⁷ These roles carry with them certain prohibitions and responsibilities, which are often regarded as unavoidable constrictions. For the children's writer, they are most typically taken to imply a need to remain acutely sensitive to the perceived needs of the intended audience. The younger the child, the more acutely these constrictions will be felt. Authors usually view the need to exercise an 'altruistic form of self-censorship' on behalf of the very young, for example.¹¹⁸ Usually this sensitivity to audience imposes some feeling of moral

¹¹⁰ James Higgins. 'The Primary Purpose of Fiction' CLE 12, No .2, (1981) p.115.

¹¹¹ *ibid.* (Higgins is quoting Graham Greene).

¹¹² Peter Hollindale. 'The Critic and the Child' p.88.

¹¹³ See Townsend 'Standards of Criticism' p. 195.; Fred Inglis The Promise of Happiness (CUP, 1981) p.4.; Perry Nodelman, 'How Typical Children Read' pp.173-178; Margery Fisher, 'Is Fiction Educational?' CLE 1, (1970) p.12.

¹¹⁴ Higgins, p.115.

¹¹⁵ Wallace Hildick. Children and Fiction: a critical study of the writing of fiction for and about children, (London: Evans, 1970) p. 139.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 129. See also Townsend, 'Standards in Criticism' p.195.

¹¹⁷ Hildick. p.129; Hollindale 'Second Impression', p.7.

¹¹⁸ Hollindale 'Second Impression' p.8. See also Jill Paton Walsh 'The Writer's Responsibility', CLE 10, p33.

and technical constraint¹¹⁹ Writing for children frequently demands that the author makes 'more or less conscious adjustments'¹²⁰ to adapt to the role. Many writers are acutely aware of 'being a literary artist if this is possible within the moral and technical constraints of writing for children.'¹²¹ DeJong, for example, speaks of 'necessarily shaping the work to my... cage of artistic form' despite claiming to write solely 'for myself'¹²² Hildick describes the 'extra burden placed on the shoulders of a conscientious children's writer' which 'ought to amount to a social duty to handle certain themes and attitudes with the greatest circumspection.'¹²³

In some sense, then, a feeling of restriction surrounds children's literature. Many people feel that the writer cannot 'experience a sense of absolute freedom' and the literature produced must be necessarily 'simpler and narrower.'¹²⁴ Some feel that it ought to be 'closed in scope' and should not be allowed to present 'a tragic view of life.'¹²⁵ Hildick recognises that an author's sensitivity to a young audience is likely to cause him to take 'certain detours or retreats.'¹²⁶

This means that, as Hollindale suggests,

If in talking of children's literature we really mean literature as we do when we are thinking of adults, as work that involves a wholeness of imaginative engagement, and profound levels of cohesion, then its emergence in a children's book must depend on a fragile coincidence of finely tuned creative play with a deep sensitivity to audience.¹²⁷

This, of course, is not achieved lightly, nor very often. This helps to explain my reasons for considering the children's dystopia to be an extremely challenging form to attempt to write, because, as I will show, the narrative conventions of the dystopia do not sit easily with the 'unspoken conventions' of children's literature, which emanate from a sense of authorial

¹¹⁹See Hunt *Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature* p.164; Hildick, p.129; Hollindale, 'Second Impression', p.7.

¹²⁰Jill Paton Walsh. 'The Rainbow Surface' in Meek et al ed. *The Cool Web*, p.192.

¹²¹G. Trease, quoted by Hollindale, 'Second Impression', p.7.

¹²²Meindert DeJong, in J. R. Townsend *A Sense of Story* (London: Longman, 1971) p.76.

¹²³Hildick op.cit. p.140.

¹²⁴James Steele Smith *A Critical Approach to Children's Literature*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967).p.13.

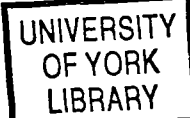
¹²⁵Clifton Fadiman 'The Case for Children's Literature', *Child L.*, 5, (1976) p.16.

¹²⁶op.cit. p.140.

¹²⁷op.cit. p.8.

responsibility to an immature audience. Writers may see them (as they often do of any children's book) as an interesting artistic challenge¹²⁸, and may habitually seek to simultaneously conform to, yet disturb, the unwritten laws of children's literature. Futuristic literature is interesting because of that disturbance and because of the technical dilemmas which that disturbance poses. I will try, as far as possible, to outline these unwritten laws, risking oversimplifying a very complex area for the sake of establishing some clear principles for my discussion in later chapters.

Most obviously, certain subject-matters may be considered 'taboo' or 'unsuitable' at any historical point (although of course, taboos are always a matter of cultural, historical and individual perception, and disagreement often results).¹²⁹ Most notable examples have included the presentation of sex, violence¹³⁰, death and 'bad language'.¹³¹ Any writer who disturbs these taboos may indeed be subject to overt censorship. An 'expurgated' version of Westall's The Machine Gunners, for example, has been printed, in which the 'bad language'¹³² has been omitted, proving that critical disapproval can indeed have a direct effect on what is made available for children.¹³³



Although the matter of 'suitable' versus 'taboo' subject-matter has always provoked heated debate, questions have been complicated by the advent of the so-called 'New Realism,' which places equal (but sometimes apparently conflicting) pressure upon an author to present a plausible picture of 'real life.' The last three decades have seen a change in the emphasis of writing for children,¹³⁴ with writers being less disposed to shelter child-readers

¹²⁸Walsh. op.cit. pp. 192-193.

¹²⁹See Hildick, op.cit. p.118.

¹³⁰Paul Briens documents the widespread disagreement concerning the appropriateness of books dealing with the subject of nuclear war for young readers 'Nuclear War Fiction for Young Readers' in Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War ed. P.Davies (Manchester & New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 1990) p. 134.

¹³¹See Robert Westall. 'How Real Do You Want Your Realism?' Signal 28 (Jan. 1979) pp.34-46.

¹³²Colin Ella describes this as 'lavatorial' and 'unnecessary', 'Drawing that Line' CLE Vol 13 no1 1982 p46.

¹³³Overt censorship was particularly rife in the 1970s, when books were often assessed against social and political criteria (such as anti-racism and anti-sexism, which were compiled on the basis of content analysis, with little regard for the literary form being used to express these values). See, for example Nat Hentoff 'Any Writer Who Follows Anyone Else's Guidelines Ought to Be In Advertising', in M. Lenz and R, Mahood eds. Young Adult Literature: Background and Criticism (Chicago: American Library Association, 1980) pp. 454-460.

¹³⁴See Sheila Egoff 'Pleasures and Precepts: Changing Emphases in the Writing and Criticism of Children's Literature', in Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature eds.Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F., (OUP, 1969) pp.419-446.

from sometimes painful reality, and more inclined to 'tell it how it is.'¹³⁵ There is now a 'greater candour in books for the young than ever before.'¹³⁶ From the 1970s onwards, books have been able to become more 'frank and sensational'¹³⁷ pushing back the boundaries of 'acceptable' subject matter. This new climate of opinion seems to stem from the fact that

...the world has not spared children hunger, cold, sorrow, pain, fear, death, loneliness, disease, war, famine, or madness. Why should we hesitate to make use of this knowledge when writing for them?¹³⁸

I would add that many writers have also chosen to depict adults, and particularly parents, in a less than positive light¹³⁹, which indicates a general loss of faith in the ability of the present generation of writers to confidently advise children how to behave and what to think.

Many have warmly welcomed this new commitment to 'truth and honesty' in the children's book.¹⁴⁰ Some suggest that, in the television age, children already have access to the world's horror and violence, and that the novel is able to treat potentially disturbing subject matter with more depth and sensitivity than the television could ever do.¹⁴¹ Others, however, have lamented it bitterly, believing that youngsters should be protected from 'unhealthy ...sordidness'¹⁴² and fearing that the opening up of the children's book to 'cynicism' is potentially harmful to child-readers.¹⁴³

In fact, many conscientious writers for the young have always perceived the need to tell children the (sometimes painful) truth, choosing to confront, rather than sidestep, the emotional crises of childhood, which may well include death, loneliness, alienation and

¹³⁵S. Root 'The New Realism: Some Personal Reflections' Language Arts (Jan. 1977) p.20.

¹³⁶Harrison, B. p.69.

¹³⁷Root, op.cit, p.20.

¹³⁸Mary Steele 'Realism, Truth and Honesty', in Children's Literature: Views and Reviews, ed. Virginia Haviland, (London: Bodley Head, 1973) p.290.

¹³⁹See David Rees The Marble in the Water (Boston, Mass.: Horn Book Inc, 1979) p.83

¹⁴⁰See Steele, op.cit. p.290; Robert Coles 'The Child's Understanding of Tragedy', Child.L.,15 (1987) p.5. Perry Nodelman, 'Doing Violence to Conventions',p.35.; M. Eakin, p.333.

¹⁴¹See Westall, 'The Vacuum and the Myth', p.37.

¹⁴²Colin Ella, p.46.

¹⁴³See Ravena Helson. 'Change, Tradition and Critical Styles in the Contemporary World of Children's Books' Child.L. 5 (1976) pp.22-39.

involve difficult choices and decisions. Many see it as a dereliction of some kind to put aside adult knowledge and speak childishly, and Walsh eloquently expounds the view that

I would not ...agree that there is any subject whatsoever that is absolutely unthinkable in a children's book. It all depends how it is done...¹⁴⁴

'Suitability' is, then, often perceived to be more a matter of technique, rather than subject-matter.¹⁴⁵ Much authorial reflection has been devoted to this area, exemplified by Storr's 'Things That Go Bump In the Night',¹⁴⁶ which concentrates upon the 'acceptable' modes of mediating 'difficult material' for children. Storr outlines several distancing techniques, highlighting the ways authors choose to tell children about violence, fear and horror in terms they can bear to know.

Whereas some authors relish the challenge of making a serious adult statement for children in ways which seem acceptable, some authors clearly feel that writing for a young audience requires them to compromise their feelings or convictions. Speaking of the production of a particular teenage novel Jean Ure, for example, has said

I had to cut out two of the girls and change the end, because they said it was anti-gay and would bring in hate mail...I do have a terribly jaundiced view of the world now, but you can't put that in a book for kids.¹⁴⁷

Ure's statement indicates her conviction that children's book cannot acceptably tell the whole truth, which makes the production of realism for children very difficult. As Brians observes, 'there is no consensus on what sort of approach is appropriate' for a writer who chooses to depict realism for a young readership, particularly when tackling traditionally 'taboo' subjects.¹⁴⁸

Despite the greater candour of recent children's literature, the one characteristic which adults are reluctant to see diminished in any way is hope. According to Harrison, hope is

¹⁴⁴op.cit. p.33.

¹⁴⁵Harrison, op.cit. p87.

¹⁴⁶in *The Cool Web* ed. Meek, M. pp.120-129.

¹⁴⁷Cited by Hunt, (1991) p.157.

¹⁴⁸Brians, op.cit. p.136.

'traditionally the animating force in children's books.'¹⁴⁹ Hope is often seen to be the main distinguishing feature of the children's novel. Natalie Babbitt, for example, believes that an optimistic outlook is the chief characteristic of children's literature as opposed to adult's:

something which turns a story ultimately toward hope rather than resignation and contains within it a difference not only between the two literatures, but also between youth and age.¹⁵⁰

The belief that children have an essentially optimistic and innocent way of looking at life, whilst adults have a tendency to be pessimistic and cynical is deeply entrenched, shaping the stories which are made available.¹⁵¹ Many adults believe that it is the writer's duty to nurture and safeguard this optimism, and that children 'need' or actively seek a hopeful way of life in the fiction they read.¹⁵² Babbitt believes that, to achieve an authentic view of childhood, the adult writer must transport himself back to a time when life stretches ahead of one, full of promise and opportunity.¹⁵³

Novels which are not seen to conform to these beliefs are likely to receive critical condemnation. Here, for example, is Earnshaw, denouncing what he sees as the overwhelming pessimism of children's science fiction:

This tendency I believe to be dangerous and mind-warping...All we have a right to do in children's science fiction is to lure them into thinking about the human condition from a detached viewpoint, and bring them back on the last page in a positive plane.¹⁵⁴

Earnshaw believes that children's writers have a duty to present 'affectionate and optimistic thinking.' These protective attitudes may seek to shield children from harm entirely, by

¹⁴⁹op.cit. p.69.

¹⁵⁰Natalie Babbitt 'Happy Endings? Of Course, and Also Joy' in Children's Literature: Views and Reviews ed. V. Haviland (1973) p.158.

¹⁵¹See Fred Inglis The Promise of Happiness (CUP, 1981)p.4.; Nodelman, op.cit. p.35.; Walsh, op.cit. p.193.

¹⁵²See Michelle Landsberg (1988) p.29; Stephanie Tolan (1986) p.361; Bacon (1977) pp.129-133.;Babbitt, op.cit. p159.; Gwenda Bond (1994) p.52.; Katherine Paterson cited by Smedman (1983) p.13.; Brian Earnshaw (1983) pp.237-242.

¹⁵³op.cit. p.159.

¹⁵⁴Brian Earnshaw. 'Planets of Awful Dread' CLE 14, No.4 (1983) p.239.

keeping children in ignorance.¹⁵⁵ Adult protectors more usually simply seek to leave the child reader 'enough light to steer by'¹⁵⁶ within the text. Lenz has argued

It is a well-established principle that hope is an essential ingredient of literature for those of tender years; nihilism does not belong in the nursery, and even teenage readers, many believe, should not be without at least a shred of comfort in books specifically addressed to them.¹⁵⁷

Her view is endorsed¹⁵⁸ by Landsberg and Bacon.

These views make it extremely difficult for the children's author to offer an unrelievedly bleak vision. This means that pessimistic adult texts become 'unacceptable options'¹⁵⁹ for the children's writer, a point which is of crucial importance to my study. The pressure to offer hope to the child reader is immense, and there is an extreme ethical resistance to an evocation of a 'realistic' sense of the 'upsetting randomness' of existence.¹⁶⁰ As a result, the children's writer is much more likely to opt to present a 'theoretically safe world,'¹⁶¹ which is capable, at least to some extent, of offering the view that benign forces can and do exist and that ultimately 'everything will be all right'.¹⁶²

At the other end of the spectrum some writers and critics, whilst upholding the need for hope, feel that over-protecting readers is potentially damaging to the young. They believe that children are more resilient than most people habitually think.¹⁶³ They denigrate what Briggs has called the 'sweet and innocent pink and baby blue stuff'¹⁶⁴ that often emerges. Nodelman, for example, believes that children's literature usually tells children to expect adults to keep them safe, which he sees as a 'limiting message'.¹⁶⁵ He values works which

¹⁵⁵See Harrison, *op.cit.* p.80.

¹⁵⁶Hollindale (1974) p.64.

¹⁵⁷Lenz (1988) p.32.

¹⁵⁸Bacon (1977) pp. 129-133; Landsberg (1988) p.29.

¹⁵⁹Stephens (1990) p.130.

¹⁶⁰Nodelman, (1987) p.34.

¹⁶¹*ibid.* p.20.

¹⁶²Babbitt, *op.cit.* p.159.

¹⁶³See Belle Mooney cited by R. Kilborn (1986) p. 102.

¹⁶⁴Raymond Briggs, cited by Kilborn, *op.cit.* p.30.

¹⁶⁵*op.cit.* p.20.

question these 'dangerously protective attitudes'¹⁶⁶ by portraying children as agents of control, who are responsible for their own safety.

Some argue that, in our times, children do not need protection, but moral complexity. As a critic Iskander believes

...teenagers face a world of computers, missiles and terrorism, they depend less on the reassurances of stereotypes and expect more complexity than did their elders whose teenage years took place in more stable times.¹⁶⁷

The children's writer Robert Westall was convinced that child protagonists should not be presented as 'victims', but should be empowered to make moral choices, and experience the full implications of those choices, for better or worse. In 'The Vacuum and the Myth' he implies that writers serve the needs of the young more adequately if they repose trust in the readers to think seriously for themselves. For Westall, hope lies in adults' ability to enter into a 'meaningful dialogue' with the young.¹⁶⁸ He views the adult's desire to protect as an evasive tactic.

An author may feel, however, that it lies within his power, 'and perhaps is his duty to recommend an improved world, reflecting not what it is but what he hopes it might be.'¹⁶⁹ Donelson expresses the view that, even in young adult literature, 'honesty must be combined with hope, a hope that is life-affirming and encourages the reader to consider and develop a workable moral philosophy.'¹⁷⁰

There is a broad spectrum of narrative strategies which writers commonly use to fulfil Donelson's aims. Often, for example, a clear (and intrusive) authorial guiding voice can be heard in children's fiction, even when the intended readership is predicted to be in its mid- or late teens. I am particularly interested in the ways in which authors arrange their narratives in order to guide the (young) readers' responses. I will show, for instance, how most

¹⁶⁶ibid. p.35.

¹⁶⁷Iskander (1987) p.14.

¹⁶⁸op.cit. p.38

¹⁶⁹Hollindale (1988), p.15.

¹⁷⁰K. Donelson (1980) p.63.

authors attempt to do this by advocating 'a workable moral philosophy' explicitly in the text itself, rather than leaving the readers to think for themselves. This is a particularly interesting (and challenging) area when authors are trying to mediate difficult (hitherto taboo) material for the young. The realistic treatment of such topics as conventional and nuclear warfare, the Nazi Holocaust, political torture and Human Rights atrocities present particular challenges to the children's writer. Research into books which take war as their subject matter shows that writers encounter many difficulties.¹⁷¹ These include: sentimentality; naively conceived "solutions" or "messages"; moral and political oversimplification (in defining friend and enemy); and an imaginative scenario in which 'hopelessness forecloses all action.'¹⁷²

These are all problems encountered by writers using the dystopian novel, which I intend to document in my remaining chapters. I will also draw attention to the strategies authors use to overcome these problems. I intend to focus mainly upon the narrative resolutions of futuristic writing. The intense pressure to present hope, to offer security and provide comfort in novels for young readers has particular implications for the endings of a novel.

The convention of the 'happy ending' is arguably the most compelling unwritten law of children's writing. As Higonnet has observed

...the norm of closure is probably the most strictly observed narrative convention in children's literature...it is by now a cliché that authors rely on the "return home" to round an adventure and to restore a sense of security and world order.¹⁷³

The ending is often believed to be the main litmus test to decide if a book is a children's book at all.¹⁷⁴ Webb, for example, considers Goodnight Mr Tom to be a children's work despite its subject (child abuse) because 'the responsibility for assuring a final safeness is clearly respected...' The book offers 'the closure of assurance, of re-assurance.'¹⁷⁵ (Interestingly she compares this book's 'point of return to safety' with the futuristic The Last

¹⁷¹See Kaminski (1987) pp.55-65.

¹⁷²ibid p.65

¹⁷³Higonnet (1987) p.47.

¹⁷⁴See Russell Hoban (1971) p. 20.; Babbitt, op.cit. p.158.

¹⁷⁵Jean Webb 'A Theoretical Approach to Goodnight Mr Tom' in Researching Children's Literature, ed. N. Broadbent et al. (Southampton: LSU Publications, 1994) p.58.

Children, 'which leaves the reader in a desolation of hopelessness', refusing to offer the closure of assurance.)

Nodelman feels that the pressure to present a 'happy ending' amounts to a generic convention. 'Strict principles of narrative organisation' have emerged, he claims, as a result of the intensively repetitive forms peculiar to the children's book.¹⁷⁶ These stem from an ethical desire to protect the young. Higonnet also asserts that 'conventions about narrative structure are certainly much stricter in children's literature than in adult literature' and this perception of genre 'controls structure; for example, most children's literature avoids tragic closure.'¹⁷⁷ This, she adds, may be traceable to a sense of genre of 'the marketplace,' and she describes how Louisa May Alcott was 'pressed into accepting a type of closure then deemed suitable to girls' books.'

Wolf has also argued that the more novels undermine the principle of a reassuring conclusion, the further they depart from being classifiable as books for children, or at least imply progressively older readers.¹⁷⁸ Books for very young readers often display a 'circular' narrative shape, with the protagonists ultimately returning home, where, despite their adventures, everything remains stable and happily secure. Hunt suggests the impulse for writers to use a 'strong resolution' stems from the urge to 'provide comfort' in books for the very young. He proposes that writers feel '...however disturbing the content of the book, the resolution will at least temper the effects...' ¹⁷⁹

Texts 'suitable for older children'¹⁸⁰ may assume a somewhat different narrative shape,¹⁸¹ although even writers addressing an older teenager tend to 'soften their stories'.¹⁸² They may include 'the return home' but 'do not satisfy all the elements of closure...and the book is in some way ambivalent.'¹⁸³ In other words they use the form of the *bildungsroman*, or

¹⁷⁶Nodelman (1985) p.5.

¹⁷⁷op.cit. p.38.

¹⁷⁸Virginia Woolf 'Paradise Lost? The Displacement of Myth', Studies in the Literary Imagination 18, ed. H. Keenan (Fall 1985) pp.53-62.

¹⁷⁹Hunt (1991) p.127.

¹⁸⁰ibid. p.128.

¹⁸¹See also Woolf, op.cit. p.60-62.

¹⁸²Nilson p.277.

¹⁸³Hunt op.cit. p.128.

'growth novel,' in which the hero's character evolves, eventually changing from childhood to maturity. Hunt observes that often the protagonist returns, but then leaves the novel at the end to move into adulthood.¹⁸⁴

According to Hunt 'adult' or more mature novels allow endings which 'are ambiguous: we see part of the texture of life'. More mature story shapes only tend to 'resolve some part of a problem, but to leave much else open.'¹⁸⁵ 'Adult' characters tend not to return home at the end of a novel, and are not transformed, but tend to move forwards through the narrative, in a more or less straight line towards death.¹⁸⁶

I will show how children's writers using future fictional time tend to resist Hunt's analysis of the more 'adult' form of imaginative resolution, and largely prefer to present narrative conclusions which typify the return home or, most usually, the *bildungsroman*. The perceived need to offer hope and reassurance to young readers makes it extremely difficult for an author to disturb the 'unspoken convention' of the (at least partially) optimistic ending.¹⁸⁷ The artistic problems raised by the desire to conform to the 'norm of closure' particularly interest me. In the remaining chapters I aim to largely concentrate upon how authors choose to end their stories, what happens to their protagonists and so on, to illuminate the ways in which writers frequently observe, yet also disturb, the convention of 'the closure of assurance'. These problems become particularly acute as the predicted age-levels of the target-readership begin to rise, which they have done as the literature has developed. The first texts I will consider (such as Dickinson's *The Weathermonger*) are clearly 'for' children (as opposed to teenagers), in that they conform to the 'return-to-normality closure'.¹⁸⁸ Later works may seem more suitable for teenagers, particularly if they more markedly take the theme and shape of the *bildungsroman*.

¹⁸⁴ibid. p.130.

¹⁸⁵ibid. p.129.

¹⁸⁶ibid.p.130.

¹⁸⁷See Nodelman, op.cit. p.19.

¹⁸⁸Sarah Gilead 'Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction' rpt. in Hunt ed. *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*, (London: Routledge, 1992) p.80.

Babbitt¹⁸⁹ and Hunt¹⁹⁰ have both observed that too often the children's book (and here I am once more using the term in the broadest sense, to include teenage novels) is so forcefully resolved that it results in oversentimentality or naïveté. Both also suggest that a happy ending is often inherently at odds with the tone of the preceding narrative, which I will in future call the 'annexed' or 'subjoined' ending. I will argue that futuristic fiction for the young often supplements the pessimistic vision of the dystopia with the inorganic addition of hope in the narrative resolution, which means that the narrative is often damagingly at odds with itself.¹⁹¹ I will use an exploration of the evolutionary metaphor to help to reveal this imaginative inconsistency. This is a very real problem for the writer tackling the 'difficult' subject matter of the dystopia. As Hunt suggests

The ambiguity of many modern teenage novels lies in...this clash between form and content. The situations are serious, but the resolutions trivial. ¹⁹²

Earnshaw's sardonic tone highlights the same point

True, there is usually a gleam of light at the end. A symbolic door creaks open, a fragile rose flowers, or a last rocket takes off for Novo Anglia.¹⁹³

For these reasons the ways in which authors attempt to suggest the hope of a better world within the context of the dystopian novel particularly interest me.

Furthermore, some commentators have suggested that the happy ending has become a reader expectation.¹⁹⁴ The 'established patterns' of children's books typically lead readers to expect that a narrative 'will evolve in a defined, continuous way.'¹⁹⁵ Higonnet asserts that children's writers tend not to deviate from the well-established narrative patterns, in which answers or solutions are eventually supplied, and the narrative can therefore be expected to result in a successful outcome to the hero's quest. The return home typically signifies a

¹⁸⁹op.cit. p.158.

¹⁹⁰Hunt (1991) p.128.

¹⁹¹Brians, (1990) for example, labels these endings 'facile resolutions' or 'bogus hopeful endings' when they occur in post-nuclear fictions for teenagers. op.cit. p.137.

¹⁹²Hunt op.cit. p. 131.

¹⁹³Earnshaw (1983) p.239.

¹⁹⁴See Nodelman (1987) p.19; Higonnet (1987) pp.37-39; Iskander (1987) p.12.

¹⁹⁵Higonnet op.cit. p. 38.

rounded adventure, in which the protagonist chooses his destiny, ultimately maintaining some measure of control.¹⁹⁶ Nodelman has also argued that these conventions of closure are so 'characteristic of children's literature that many four-year-olds have already learned to expect them.'¹⁹⁷ The reader is likely to have firm expectations about how a narrative will conclude, (that is, happily) and may well seek to load the text accordingly.¹⁹⁸ When authors violate these conventions, disrupting the reader's quest for unity in order to gain a particular imaginative effect (for example, by using the unexpected unhappy ending to provoke the reader into a recognition of the need to become actively involved, revolting against the ideas presented in the book's world) the reader may be anticipated to 'try to make the experience whole.'¹⁹⁹ Writers may also try to violate readers' expectations (by using suspense at the end of their stories, for instance,²⁰⁰ leaving what happens up to our imagination in an unwritten conclusion, in which the story presented appears to be somehow incomplete as it stands) in order to provoke the reader's own sense of moral responsibility and a recognition of the need for moral action.

Higonnet points out that few children's texts display the adult text's tendency to present more open, looser structures. If adult novelists employ these in the desire for the illusion of naturalness and to create a sense of realism, children's writers by and large resist these techniques. Higonnet observes that the children's writer particularly resists the 'phenomenon of anti-closure,' in which the story 'fizzles,' or in which the author suggests alternative endings to stimulate the reader to action, in a search for new organising principles. Her essay describes the rare use of narrative gaps or fragments used within certain children's texts to 'conceal threatening material', by encouraging the child to explore difficulties at a subconscious level. But, she says,

The most violent type of narrative rupture affects the conclusion itself. When the conventions of narrative closure are violated, the reader cannot look for help from a "next part." There are two obvious responses to a fragmentary or problematic close. Readers may assume they have misread and reread the story in order to find the signposts leading to this conclusion. Or they may assume they have read correctly and extrapolate a further narrative that encompasses and gives meaning to the apparently

¹⁹⁶See also Stephens (1992) p.127, who asserts post-disaster fiction produces 'strong thematic closure.'

¹⁹⁷*op.cit.* p.19.

¹⁹⁸Higonnet *op.cit.* p37.

¹⁹⁹*ibid.* p.39.

²⁰⁰*ibid.* pp.50-51.

incomplete structure at hand, as an archaeologist reconstructs the pot from the sherd.
(p.47)

She suggests that the uncertainty of a 'dramatic, suspended conclusion, a true narrative sherd'²⁰¹ may be used to 'provoke responses' which reinforce the message that the implied reader must act to rewrite the social world.

I am particularly interested in the extent to which children's dystopian novelists employ sherd-like conclusions (in varying degrees) to disturb the 'unwritten law' of the closure of reassurance, and I will consider the effect these endings may have on the preceding text. The unwritten conclusion (in which we never really know what happens ultimately to the teenage heroes, nor whether their quests for a better, alternative lifestyle will be satisfied) is reasonably characteristic of the children's dystopia, but Higonnet notes that the violation of narrative closure is extremely uncommon, even in young adult literature. She points to Cormier's 'negative, seemingly hopeless conclusions' in which 'his brave and moral protagonists generally fail - a striking violation of the conventions of adolescent literature.'
(p.49)

Cormier is an interesting case in point, because his failure to conform to the convention of the happy ending has become so notorious. Like Higonnet, Iskander believes that Cormier uses the 'shocking, unhappy, but quite realistic endings' to 'make his readers think long after they have closed his novels.'²⁰² 'His books "argue" for moral responsibility far more effectively than sermonising or stereotypical formulas of virtue automatically triumphant.'
(p18) He ironically calls upon the reader's expectations that moral order will ultimately be re-established, and in so doing he issues a clear warning - 'all for the purpose of making the reader move beyond the close of the novels to a new sense of personal responsibility.'²⁰³

In other words, Cormier is unusual in that he chooses to leave the reader to supply the balancing view, reposing more trust in the reader than is common in writing for the young. Not only does he empower his readers to actively make choices, but he presupposes young

²⁰¹ibid. p.50.

²⁰² S. Iskander 'Readers, Realism and Robert Cormier' Child.L 15 (1987) p.18.

²⁰³ibid. p. 17

readers are capable of responding to irony, and are able to contrast the literal meaning of the text and an alternate ironic meaning. In other words, his material asks (like the admonitory 'adult' dystopia) for more unguided independence of response than most writers for children traditionally accept. Often his books are rejected by adults²⁰⁴ (although notably not by teenagers) as nihilistic, bleak, utterly hopeless and 'completely ruthless...and frightening'²⁰⁵ because they fail to offer 'some affirmative message'²⁰⁶ within the text itself. Many would concur with Brians' view that 'surely dark irony has no place in young people's fiction.'²⁰⁷ I will show how few futuristic writers risk using the unequivocally unhappy ending, but tend instead to use a relatively open ending to leave room for the possibility that the hero will find or forge a better life elsewhere in an unwritten narrative future.

The questions Cormier's work raises are not simply a matter of an ethical duty to protect young readers' idealism, but are also concerned with the predicted levels of reading competence of young readers. Perhaps it is the case that the 'unwritten conventions' of children's literature have emerged in the belief that it is simpler and safer to expect young readers to endorse simple affirmations, and more demanding and dangerous to expect them to respond to ironies and qualifications.²⁰⁸ Perhaps the 'formulaic happy endings' that Nodelman observes are less concerned with ethical considerations, and more to do with an attempt to organise the narrative so that the reader is asked ultimately to converge on the dominant surface ideology or 'message' that the writer seeks to convey.²⁰⁹

The adult interpretations of Cormier's work testify to the dangers of a 'misreading' of irony. Possibly authors feel that they are best able to exercise control over their moral meaning (and over the responses of their target audience) by repudiating irony and by 'overcoding' their narrative. This has significant implications in terms of the ending, which I will show is often used, paradoxically, to produce strong thematic closure, finally blending the moral questions and ideological paradoxes raised by the preceding dystopian framework into a dominant, mandated single ideological meaning. I will demonstrate that, despite the

²⁰⁴See Landsberg (1988) p.74; Nilson, p.112.

²⁰⁵March-Penny cited by Iskander. op.cit. p.7

²⁰⁶A. MacLeod 'Robert Cormier and the Adolescent Novel' *CLE* 12, No.2, (1981) pp.74-81.

²⁰⁷Brians, op.cit.p.145.

²⁰⁸See Iskander, op.cit. p.8

²⁰⁹See Nodelman (1981) pp.173-178. ; Gilead op.cit. p100.

narrative's apparently open ending, most futuristic stories are (like their equivalent 'adult' pre-texts) ideologically closed, but that, in stark contrast with the 'adult' works, most children's texts use the ending to directly articulate an attractive alternative to the unattractive ideologies formerly presented.

Many commentators express the view that children's books should, of necessity, be 'simpler' in construction, largely because of the perceived simplicity of children and their inability to interpret subtlety. Warnock, for example, believes that

...there is no need to try to be clever in children's books...If a writer wants to convey a message, he must do it straight out. Irony, ambiguity, vagueness of intention are all fatal, as are efforts to shock or startle.²¹⁰

Tucker²¹¹ believes that works for the young are necessarily technically restricted. The need for comprehensibility or 'accessibility' may mean simplification²¹² or may be seen as a technical challenge.²¹³ Adults may believe that few concessions should be made. Moss observes, however, that works by Cormier and Garner,²¹⁴ 'which place considerable demand on teenage readers, are 'innovative and experimental' and far from common. He continues

...the form of writing generally exemplified in fiction for children invites the reader to accept that the author has expressed his or her personality in a unique vision...and that the reader has direct access to that personality. Technique and structure are backgrounded so that the message of the text is conveyed through an apparently neutral or transparent medium which allows the utmost identification with the author's intention...The majority of the fiction aimed at the teenage market is 'closed'; it aims to deny ...plurality of meaning... Such texts assume a form of innocence, especially about the medium of language, on behalf of the reader who is invited to accept, without question, an established relationship between signifier and signified. ²¹⁵

In short, there is a widespread assumption that children's books must be 'closed texts' in which the 'writer has attempted to do all the work for the reader, to limit the possibilities of

²¹⁰Mary Warnock 'Escape into Childhood' *New Society*(May 13th, 1971) p.823

²¹¹cited by Hunt (1991)p.44.

²¹²See Hunt *ibid.* p.45.

²¹³See Walsh (1977) *op.cit.*

²¹⁴See, for example, Robert Cormier *After the First Death* (New York:Pantheon, 1979) and Alan Garner *Red Shift* (London: William Collins and Co. Ltd., 1973)

²¹⁵cited Hunt (1992) p.45.

interpretation, to heavily guide understanding.²¹⁶ Hunt points out that the attempt to control the narrative is a simplistic notion, which 'real' reader research, such as that conducted by the Cragos, has begun to uncover.²¹⁷ Benton's research²¹⁸ has shown that in fact children are far more competent at handling texts than is usually assumed.

The fierce debate over Cormier's work usefully illustrates the oversimplification to which the criticism of children's literature is prone. The question as to whether Cormier's novels are nihilistic or optimistic ultimately depends upon the reader's interpretation and whether we 'move our attention away from an exclusive focus on content and plot and turn it also to observe the position of the reader in the text'.²¹⁹

The debate has hinged upon disagreements over what is regarded by the critics to be the 'right' or 'most successful' reading. Many issues underlie this debate, but for my present purposes I would like to pick out two. The first is to signal my awareness of the complex ways in which fiction and its medium, language, work, which in turn have particular implications for critical understandings of how a book's didacticism and ideology may be carried. Often too much emphasis is placed on *what* children read, rather than *how* it might be read. The second and related point is to question the assumption held by many critics that there is a single 'right' reading of a text which will be common to all skilled readers. A brief discussion of both these points is necessary to illuminate my own critical position.

Because of the obvious power relationship between adult writer and child reader, discussions 'focused upon ideology have tended to be polemic',²²⁰ to address specific issues such as censorship,²²¹ or, as in the debate on Cormier's work, have covertly underpinned the comments being made. Theoretical explorations in the field have only advanced significantly in the last decade, although most people now agree it is impossible to write an ideologically neutral text. Sutherland,²²² writing in 1985, was only just beginning to throw light upon the

²¹⁶Hunt (1991) p.81.

²¹⁷*ibid.* p.127.

²¹⁸*ibid.* p.48.

²¹⁹Wilkie (1995) *op.cit* p. 7

²²⁰Hunt (1992) p.18. See Inglis (1981); Dixon (1977).

²²¹See Hamida Bosmajian, (1987); Jessica Yates (1980) pp.180-191

²²²Robert Sutherland 'Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature' CLE 16, No.3 (1985)pp.143-157.

complexity of the issues. He argued that even the most simple children's book inescapably embodied its author's ideology or values, which he broadly defined as

a set of views and assumptions regarding such things as "human nature," social organisation and norms of behavior, moral principles, questions of good and evil, right and wrong, and what is important in life... (p.143)

These, he said, may be expressed 'consciously or unconsciously, openly or indirectly' (p.143), but because no writer can avoid making decisions about selecting what does and does not go into a book, and about the narrative organisation they will use 'to illustrate their themes' and point their morals, then all fiction is unavoidably political, and 'potentially persuasive.' (p.144). Sutherland's work is important in that it established a broader definition of politics than was commonly recognised, allowing for a deeper recognition of the diverse modes of persuasion different texts exhibit. Sutherland's classificatory system for the ways in which ideologies are expressed has been surpassed, but provides useful short-hand (if simplistic and not entirely discrete) statements which allow me to generalise about the futuristic texts I intend to discuss.

Firstly, Sutherland describes the 'politics of advocacy,' in which authors plead for a specific cause or set of values, which may be abstract and largely conservative (expressing what I described earlier as the 'central tenets of children's literature'), such as 'loyalty, courage, fortitude, sharing, tolerance of eccentricity, friendship, optimism..and being content with one's lot.' (p.146) It may, Sutherland recognises, also present a corpus of more radical values (in Lenz's sense, for example), as the search for a new myth, along, say, feminist or ecological lines. He stresses that the politics of advocacy are active, conscious attempts to persuade readers of 'what ought to be' (p.147)

I am interested in the ways in which writers use the dystopian form to raise hope by inducing 'admiration and extolling certain values as virtues' (p.146) when their chosen form essentially relies upon what Sutherland describes as 'the closely allied... politics of attack... [which] may range from the gentlest ironic satire to the bitterest invective.' (p.147) The ideological principles that the author intends to advocate remain unstated or 'implicit' (p.147) and readers are required to 'draw their own conclusions'. (p.151) Like other

commentators, Sutherland recognises that 'irony and satire are effective only when they are recognised as such' (p.151) and observes that

it may be that the politics of attack tends to be expressed less openly and viciously in children's literature than it is in literature written for adults. Attacks as direct and bitterly edged as those of ...Jonathan Swift...are not commonly encountered in literature for children. Also in children's literature there seems to be relatively little attack of a topical sort. (p.150)

This is interesting in that it emphasises the unusual nature of dystopian literature for the young.

Sutherland's final category 'the politics of assent,' suggests that texts may reveal writers' unconscious assumptions about how things are, rather than about how things ought, or ought not, to be. These are likely to be consensus views, shared by authors and most readers alike, and largely invisible as a result.

Hollindale's theoretical work in this area²²³ has considerably advanced Sutherland's early explorations, particularly in terms of the critical implications and questions his complex view of ideology raises. To summarise ruthlessly, he argues that ideology may be carried in three ways. The first is via the 'surface ideology', the 'conspicuous or explicit social, political or moral beliefs recommended by a writer' deliberately and 'pointedly.' His work is important in that he extends Sutherland's emphasis on 'politics' to encompass 'didacticism.' He suggests that on the level of surface ideology didacticism can be accomplished in various ways, from simply telling readers what to think by heavily coding one's ideological explicitness intrusively, 'which is usually achieved at the cost of imaginative depth', or by trusting to literary organisation to achieve a moral effect.

The term 'didactic function' needs recognising and re-evaluating for my purposes. For the purposes of the thesis I will take the term to mean 'the desire to inculcate a moral lesson.'²²⁴ It is habitually used by critics to exclude literary features,²²⁵ but as a critical concept,

²²³Peter Hollindale 'Ideology and the Children's Book' *Signal* 55 (Jan.1988) pp.3-22.

²²⁴William Golding 'Fable' in *The Cool Web* ed. Meek et al. (1977) p.197.

²²⁵See Townsend, (1969); Molson (1977)p.204; Donelson (1980)p.60; Engdahl (1980) p.45; Garner cited by Chambers (1980)p.197.

didacticism can be more than just a label for the complacent illustration of a moral truism in writing of low literary merit. It may be accomplished in ways which are not so obtrusive and disruptive of the fictional world, with the writer trusting to the reader's intelligence (with the result it can, of course, be misunderstood).

Hollindale also traces a 'passive ideology,' or a writer's 'unexamined assumptions.' Thus it becomes 'impossible to confine ideology to a writer's conscious intentions or articulated messages, and necessary to accept that all children's literature is inescapably didactic.' (p.12) This definition firmly establishes the writer as an educator, even if the role is inadvertently adopted.

Furthermore, Hollindale's work recognises that the conscious surface ideology and the passive ideology may well be at odds with each other, and that writers may well contradict their text's 'official' ideas by their unconscious assumptions. This holds particular relevance for my work. It means that Ure, for example, may well claim to eliminate her 'jaundiced view of the world', but her 'real' beliefs are likely to emerge at deeper imaginative levels (in her convictions about the reality of 'human nature', for example). Moreover, the frequency with which writers conform to the 'unwritten law' of the happy ending, or tend to feel the need to provide a balanced view within the book, rather than leave it implicit²²⁶ means that the ideology expressed in the dystopian narrative is often at odds with the surface ideology expressed by the happy or improving ending. I will document how futuristic fiction for children is often characterised by conflicting ideological 'messages' operating within the text.

Some commentators have seen this ideological fracture as a serious flaw in futuristic fiction for the young. Pattow, for instance, has observed

It is one thing to present unreconciled ambiguities - often the aim of a mature writer - and quite another to offer the reader unreconciled thematic contradictions, often the sign of either an immature or an insincere writer.²²⁷

²²⁶See Hilary Crew (1988) p.81.

²²⁷ Donald J. Pattow (1977)p.156.

Similarly Stephens finds much post-holocaust literature 'simplistic and false' 'because it takes the form of an heroic narrative moving toward an optimistic outcome.' ²²⁸

It is important to emphasise the difficulties that are presented by the pressure to conform to a happy ending or to make at least some degree of reassurance available within the text itself. Bond outlines the tactical dilemmas facing the children's writer who chooses to work with 'taboo' material in the field of human rights. To writers who

...have nailed their colours to the mast of consciousness-raising there are considerable challenges...They may have to lead young readers into dark and disturbing / areas of human experience, yet they have a responsibility to leave those readers at the end, not with a crushing burden of despair, but with a sense of hope.²²⁹

Bond finds as a result that many books about these issues have 'contrived happy endings which..will not do, on a human or a literary level.'

In other words these texts have not proved capable of resolving their artistic difficulties. They have not achieved the wholeness of imaginative engagement and the profound levels of cohesion required by literature.

In addition, if the ending reveals a lack of trust in the reader, then one of the key questions facing futuristic fiction must be how can writers create a medium (the narrative organisation) which does not contradict the 'message'? How can writers take their ideological commitment to encourage children to *think* seriously without contradicting that impulse in the way they handle their narratives, particularly given the perceived need to 'guide' the young reader? In the remaining chapters I want to explore the spectrum of authorial strategies used to minimise these substantial problems.

These problems are complicated further because, as Hollindale emphasises, the reader plays a key role in the construction of any text's ideology: 'ideology is not something which is transferred to children as if they were empty receptacles. It is something which they already

²²⁸ John Stephens (1992) p.126.

²²⁹Gwenda Bond. op.cit. p.52.

possess.' ²³⁰ To see fiction as a largely uncontrollable process, with 'a force of its own which is not under fully conscious control' and 'simply uncommandable' as Jill Paton Walsh sees it²³¹ means we 'cannot assume that easy transformations can be made by humanely open-minded critical inquiry'²³² Instead, books may well produce 'unexpected results,' quite contrary to authorial intention. Hollindale cautions against a belief in the effectiveness of 'much over-confident surface didacticism' which is only likely to preach to the converted. The problems of changing the reader's habitual disposition, however slightly, or of shading the corporately understood meanings of our 'interpretative community'²³³ are enormous. A literature which hopes to teach for change, as I believe futuristic fiction for children does, faces considerable challenges as a result.

These recent theories of ideology owe a great deal to the implications of recent literary theory, particularly the 'patently obvious position of necessary plurality of meaning and response.'²³⁴ The reorientation of literary research (as displayed by Higonnet) which moves the centre of interest away from the work itself and towards a new centre of interest (the relationship between book and reader) has been a particularly potent idea for children's literature. Literary theory has helped us to recognise that the book is like a musical score, whose value depends upon what the musicians make of it. Most importantly, the business of interpretation is no longer reserved for 'experts', but is the province of lay-people, including, of course, children themselves.²³⁵ This leads to the idea that there are as many books as there are readers, which is why I shall talk of 'preferred' and available readings when I aim to investigate the sort of reader the text itself tries to create.

An appreciation of the implications of literary theory and the complex ways in which texts work is beginning to erode what Hunt has termed the 'unfortunate divisions' between so-called 'child-people' and 'book-people'.²³⁶ As Hollindale's article discusses, particularly because of the formative nature of children's books, the criteria against which children's

²³⁰Hollindale (1988) p.17.

²³¹Walsh, op.cit. p.33

²³²Hollindale, (1988)p.17.

²³³Stanley Fish cited by Chambers (1983) p.52.

²³⁴Hunt(1990)p.3.

²³⁵ibid.p.10.

²³⁶ibid. p3.

books should be judged is hotly debated. Much publicised arguments have arisen between those whose critical priorities rest with the perceived needs of the child reader (whom Townsend described as 'child-people,') and those whose priorities rest mainly with the literary artefact (Townsend's 'book-people'). Hollindale's work on ideology contributes significantly to our understanding how, owing to the inescapably didactic nature of all fiction, these priorities are simply that, a question of emphasis rather than principle. That Townsend never intended a stark division is clear. He believes that

...different standards can co-exist within the mind of the same person at the same time... because we care about both books and children, book-centred and child-centred views are all jumbled together in our heads...It is easy for mental sideslips to occur...
237

The questions of educational philosophy, ideology and aesthetics raised by children's literature are inseparable. In an earlier article Hollindale noted that literary theory's contributions to our understanding of the complexity of the reading process '...prompts questions of immediate concern to the literary critic and educator alike,' making it increasingly impossible to separate the 'writer as educator' from the 'writer as literary artist.'²³⁸

Because the literature produced for children is typically highly conscious of the inequality between adult author and intended child audience the reading contract is often forefronted in the text and needs to be taken into account by criticism. So, although my own critical priorities lie with the text, I do have some notion of an imaginary young reader in mind, the one implied by the text,²³⁹ which must have some bearing on my critical approach.

My work also responds to the general shift of emphasis toward a critical interest in the relationship between reader and text. Like Higonnet, I intend to focus on the ways in which writers structure their material to consciously provoke a particular response for an imagined young audience. Because I believe that a single response is highly unlikely, I will attempt to outline a spectrum of probable readings which a particular text makes available.

²³⁷ 'Standards of Criticism for Children's Literature' p.63.

²³⁸'Second Impression' p.7.

²³⁹See Chambers 'The Reader in the Book'

Furthermore, I believe that some authors, too, have responded to the issue of plurality of meaning and response, often, as far as one can tell, deliberately constructing several possible interpretations to overcome the problem that the dystopian form asks for more unguided independence of response than most writers for children traditionally accept. I will term one the 'preferred' reading, which I believe implies a sophisticated reader who is capable of recognising irony and satire. I have discovered, however, that many writers often construct another more heavily coded or more literal reading, which seems designed to act as a 'safety net' for naive, more literal readers who miss the preferred reading. During my discussion of some individual texts I will refer to this as the 'naive' or 'probable' reading.

I will now turn to briefly outline some recent developments in the world of children's literature which seem likely to have had some bearing on authors' decisions to turn to the dystopian form in recent years. In the late 1960s what has been typically hailed as a 'new' category of fiction emerged, which has been known variously as the 'teenage, adolescent or young adult' novel.²⁴⁰ It has generally been marked by 'taboo-breaking realism'²⁴¹ and a disposition to employ subject-matter which would traditionally seem 'unsuitable' for younger readers. Ray²⁴² connects this with changing publishing circumstances. She suggests that until publishing houses began to distinguish adolescent fiction from books for younger children, writers could not feel free to tackle new themes for a teenage readership.²⁴³ Imprints, such as Bodley Head's 'New Adults' label²⁴⁴ (which emerged in 1969) started to segregate the material intended for adolescents from the children's lists, and 'gatekeepers' (such as children's librarians) could readily identify material which might offend the guardians of younger children.²⁴⁵

From the 1970s teenage novels were produced in huge numbers, often tackling such 'relevant' or 'contemporary'²⁴⁶ themes as sex, drugs, abortions, suicide, rape and divorce. Many were characterised by the dispirited tone of Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, and

²⁴⁰Peter Hollindale 'The Adolescent Novel of Ideas' CLE (1995) p.84.

²⁴¹*ibid.* p.84. See also Donelson, p.62.

²⁴²Sheila Ray 'The Development of the Teenage Novel' in ed. J. Foster Reluctant to Read (London: Ward Lock Educational, 1977) pp.46-63.

²⁴³See also S. Engdahl 'Do Teenage Novels Fulfil a Need?' pp.41-48.

²⁴⁴See Elaine Moss 'The Seventies in British Children's Books' pp.60-62.

²⁴⁵See E. Mace 'Books and the Young' Growing Point 19 No.1 (May 1980) p.3,690.

²⁴⁶See Ray *op.cit.*; Townsend 'How Young is an Adult?' in Written for Children (1974) pp.291-297.

displayed an aggression or cynicism unusual in the children's book world. The prevalence of sensational themes, which have predictably raised considerable controversy under the 'suitability' banner,²⁴⁷ often draws critical attention away from more serious teenage novelists, who use their fiction to tackle overtly political themes, and to confront searching issues surrounding questions of authority, morality, human rights, the individual and society.

So far my discussion has used the broad term 'children's literature' to outline some general principles which are commonly thought to underlie any literature for a non-peer audience. I have suggested that many adults believe that the higher the age-level of the predicted audience, the more possible it is to tackle increasingly 'taboo' themes and issues, to offer more sophisticated ideas, and to make available more subtle and complex forms of narration. Many adults see adolescents as an entirely different species of reader from the pre-teen reader, or at least having different needs and interests.²⁴⁸ In short, many teenage writers claim, like Hentoff, that 'there is no need to be self-limiting in teenage novels,'²⁴⁹ although the 'gatekeepers' (publishers and buyers, for example) may well insist that writers observe the 'unwritten laws' of children's literature to some degree.²⁵⁰

Most of the futuristic novels that I intend to consider can usefully be thought of as teenage novels (apart from the earliest works, such as The Weathermonger). I believe they are an important, but much neglected part of the phenomenon of teenage fiction, which answers

...in part to a social phenomenon which has won plenty of attention this century: the fore-shortening of childhood, earlier physical maturity, and the virtual coming to be of a two-phase adolescence, where the 'preadult' (roughly from ten to thirteen) precedes the 'young adult' (fourteen until the age of leaving school).²⁵¹

The literature I will consider typically implies, in my view, a reader from one of these two stages of adolescence (although of course, books may well in fact be read by a much younger audience).

²⁴⁷See Brians. p.133.

²⁴⁸See Chambers 'Alive and Flourishing: a Personal View of Teenage Literature' in ed. Kennerley Teenage Reading (London: Ward Lock, 1979) p.22.; J.Rowe Townsend, op.cit. p. 291.

²⁴⁹Nat Hentoff 'Fiction for Teenagers', p.405.

²⁵⁰See Westall (1979) p.35; Hentoff op.cit. p.400.

²⁵¹Hollindale (1995) p.84.

The existence of a specific literature for teenagers rests upon some fundamental assumptions about the nature of adolescence, which is, like childhood, beset with contradictions.²⁵² Definitions of adolescence vary considerably.²⁵³ Certain literary themes are commonly regarded as appropriate, or of particular interest to teenagers. Some may view teenagers as having a specific outlook on life (usually basically idealistic and optimistic, but also newly aware of the hard truths of existence).²⁵⁴

Insofar as I perceive the implied audience of dystopian fiction for the young to be, in general terms, a teenager, it is necessary to outline the assumptions that I make when I am using the term. Firstly, I believe that futuristic fiction implies a generation which has a tendency to inquire about huge social and political issues and to experiment with abstract, conjectural thought.²⁵⁵ Many commentators see modern teenagers in this light, being 'more mature in their interests than those of former generations'²⁵⁶. Egoff and others have accounted for the teenager's fascination with science fiction in this way, by arguing that science fiction is the only literary form which obviously makes large statements about the nature of our time.²⁵⁷ I see futuristic fiction as an attempt to address these interests.

Secondly, I see teenagers as being characterised by a tendency to 'see the world with a more questioning eye.'²⁵⁸ They are at a point of transition themselves, poised between childhood and adult life, and in this sense are perhaps best situated to adapt to change and to be capable of a receptivity to new ideas and modes of perception. Theorists point to their desire to develop an emergent ideology.²⁵⁹ They are predictably less fixed in their beliefs than adults, whilst sufficiently intellectually confident to think independently, and have moved away from child-like solipsism and narcissism. Most importantly, they are predicted

²⁵²Susan Thomson 'Images of Adolescence' *Signal* 34 (1981)p38.

²⁵³See David Russell 'The Common Experience of Adolescence' *Journal of Youth Services* (1988) pp.58-63.

²⁵⁴See C. Boddy (1991) p.11.

²⁵⁵See Egoff 'Science Fiction' p.391.

²⁵⁶Engdahl, 'Perspective on the Future' p.426.

²⁵⁷Egoff, *ibid.* p.388.

²⁵⁸Thomson, *op.cit.* p.39.

²⁵⁹See Russell, *op.cit.*, Thomson, *op.cit.* Hollindale (1995) p.86.

to have a passion for moral idealism.²⁶⁰ Many teenage writers rationalise their decision to address teenagers in precisely these terms. Brinsmead, for example, writes

The young ones are the relevant people today... It's no use writing about hope for us oldies; we've already lost the glorious fight, and cheerfully, too.²⁶¹

Swindells, defending his post-nuclear teenage dystopia Brother in the Land, similarly argued that it is too late to expect adults to be capable of the radical changes necessary to halt nuclear madness.²⁶²

Teenagers may be anticipated to possess a higher level of emotional tolerance than children.²⁶³ Their cognitive development may imply a capacity for sophistication not only in terms of the complexity of the ideas they can be expected to handle, but also in terms of their skills as readers. The emergence of teenage literature made room for experimental and demanding texts like Breaktime and Red Shift. Although these texts are rarities²⁶⁴ and the teenage novel typically places significantly lower demands on its reader, teenage literature may reveal a tendency for authors (such as Hamilton, Le Guin, Dickinson, Mark) to raise the anticipated levels of maturity, education and intellectual competence to serve the needs of a 'young adult' audience.

Wolf's assumptions about teenagers and young adults are of particular relevance to my study. Analysing the displacement of myth in novels for the young, she describes how books for younger adolescents may 'move toward the demonic, but not until *Lord of the Flies*, which is clearly an adolescent novel, does the demonic prevail.' (p.63)

In other words, she assumes that Golding's irony, in which Paradise is lost and not regained, is only suitable for, or implies, a young adult audience. (Incidentally, other commentators feel that Golding's novel is not 'for' young people in any sense.) Wolf regards the

²⁶⁰See Boyer (1989) p.98; Iskander (1987) p.18.

²⁶¹H. Brinsmead in Townsend ed. A Sense of Story (1971)p.46.

²⁶²R. Swindells in M. Rosen ed. Treasure Islands (1993) p.122.

²⁶³See Iskander, op.cit. p.8.; Wolf op.cit. pp. 60-62; Brians op.cit. p. 136.

²⁶⁴Hunt (1992) p. 45.

adolescent's ability to respond to the ironic mode and to tolerate pessimism as a key factor by which to determine to which developmental stage a book is truly suited.

Distance between readers and characters, the essential feature for enjoyment of irony, is [in Lord of the Flies] necessary for understanding the book. Young children, of course, identify with rather than distance themselves from characters. The capability for such distance is usually a feature of adolescents' cognitive development as they approach their twenties... (p.62)

As I will show, few futuristic novels approach these levels of irony and pessimism, but the levels they do achieve, and the themes they tackle, suggest a teenage audience.

My discussion throughout this chapter has drawn upon commentary about teenage novels as well as preteen books, to underline that there is still intense pressure on an author to present hope for any young readership. Teenage writers must try to achieve their art within the confines of the technical and moral constraints of their awareness of this special audience.²⁶⁵

I have attempted to sketch the pressures which are brought to bear on the children's novelist to highlight the difficulties which the dystopian form presents to these writers. As I suggested in the Introduction, futuristic literature produced for the young often lacks imaginative cohesion, and I intend to approach the huge diversity of futuristic fiction from a particular and original standpoint. I will demonstrate that the bulk of teenage futuristic writing adopts the literary form of the dystopia, by projecting 'realism into the near-future.'²⁶⁶ At a surface level these fictions invariably raise questions of a political and social nature, much in the manner of Huxley or Orwell. I will assert that, more like Golding, consciously or subconsciously, teenage writers frequently attribute their dystopian scenarios to fundamental flaws in human nature itself, thus raising searching questions about the biological reality of our species, prompting us to ask just how humanity and human behaviour integrate into the universal pattern of existence. I will use an exploration of the evolutionary metaphor which underlies these futuristic works to reveal this (often

²⁶⁵See Donelson (1980) p.63.; Ray (1977) p.20: both feel writers have a responsibility to protect youngsters to some degree. See also Eleanor Cameron 'MacLuhan, Youth & Literature' Horn Book 49 (Feb. 1973) pp.79-85

²⁶⁶R. Scholes (1975) p.71.

submerged) agenda. I will argue that at deep imaginative levels these future visions are thus perceived as a biological problem, which leads writers to an imaginative dependence on evolutionary thought. Some writers clearly focus their stories upon this context of ideas, most particularly in the texts I discuss in Chapter 5. In the next three chapters I will develop my central thesis: that the tactical dilemmas facing authors are exacerbated by the presentation of the evolutionary mechanism that the dystopian form demands or at least implies. I will argue that the ways in which teenage novelists often seek to leave room for a hopeful interpretation of the book, particularly in the resolution and the transformation of the teenage hero, often seem naive and simplistically conceived because they contradict the author's deeper fears about human nature itself, and their 'real' belief that physical development and moral evolution are likely to diverge in future.

In Chapter 2 I will introduce these ideas by considering Wyndham's use of the futuristic mutation novel. In Chapters 3 and 4 I will consider the view of the evolutionary mechanism underpinning the dystopian writing of Huxley, Orwell and Golding. In Chapter 5 I will discuss a different view of the evolutionary process, exemplified by Le Guin. It seems necessary at this stage, however, to outline my key understandings of evolutionary thought.

Darwin's The Descent of Man has inspired a spectrum of imaginative responses since its inception. Its principles have indelibly entered our culture as part of our imaginative vocabulary and writers often co-opt its imagery. It is one of the key scientific changes I alluded to earlier, and its impact has deeply affected our view of ourselves.²⁶⁷ In scientific terms evolution is used to explain the process by which simple organisms gradually develop into more complex ones, each more suitably adapted to prevailing environmental conditions than its predecessor. It is generally accepted that the ultimate survival of a new form is determined by an effect known as natural selection, or the 'survival of the fittest.'

There are two classical theories of evolution. Orthodox Darwinian theory sees evolution operating through the natural selection of inheritable variation. Darwin envisaged evolution as a smooth slide of gradual change. Scientists such as Bateson (1861-1926) and de Vries

²⁶⁷See R. Scholes op.cit. p.35.; Syal (1995) p.8.

(1848-1935) challenged Darwin's idea of gradual development, suggesting that evolution was mediated through sudden, spontaneous, unpredictable and dramatic changes. But for both theories, the crucial principle of natural selection remains sound. Natural selection acts upon variation on many levels, crucially allowing populations to 'keep up with' possible environmental change.

In one sense evolution is a massively wasteful process, because of its hit-and-miss dependence upon variation, a phenomenon which S J Gould²⁶⁸ has termed 'creative waste.' Natural selection has no purpose in mind, no direction in which it is travelling. It entirely relies upon chance, reacting opportunistically, for example, to changes in the environment, or seizing blindly upon the chance occurrence of random genetic change. It cannot predict future development, but only act upon present circumstances.

Therefore the correct depiction of evolution in scientific terms is not linear and upwards, like a ladder. The totality of evolutionary pathways may be better imagined as a bush with many branches, with free 'decisions' at each branching point. The dependence on chance is often seen as a 'cosmic game of dice.'²⁶⁹ This is an uncomfortable notion, undermining the misconception that there is an inevitable 'ascent' in evolution, a false assumption which is probably the dominant one about evolution.

In scientific terms, evolution is simply a measure of biological success and can only be used metaphorically when applied to questions of morality. Most frequently to the non-scientist 'the survival of the fittest' (the competition for scant resources) is taken to mean that survival results in the stark choice: eat or be eaten. Writers draw on this as a moral analogy which expresses their fears that evolution works on the level of the individual and actually selects for the most ruthless, aggressive, selfish individuals who are those most 'fit' to compete and survive.²⁷⁰ The species is then seen to be guided by this process, for those individuals are the ones that live to pass on their genes, whilst individuals displaying desirable moral characteristics are physically weak, or by moral analogy are less prepared to

²⁶⁸S. J. Gould *Eight Little Piggies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993)

²⁶⁹J. Monod *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Knopf, 1971. Rpt. London: Collins, 1972) p.122.

²⁷⁰See Greenleaf (1992) p.50.

display aggression and impose their will, and thus lose the race for survival. Society evolves accordingly, the precepts of social Darwinism are often used to justify a society built on self-interest. Although writers may suggest two ways of viewing human nature within this context, the morally laudable version of humanity will seem a fragile concept.

This view of evolution readily suggests that aggression (in a nature 'red in tooth and claw') is the sole or predominant driving force behind the evolutionary mechanism and views the expression of violence as inevitable. This typically generates a pessimistic vision of human nature itself, which is constantly attempting to move in the direction of aggression and moral decline. It may allow that humans have developed rational thought, thereby permitting themselves to overcome the natural instincts of their evolutionary inheritance by creating systems of morality to keep the natural instinct for aggression in check, but these systems are always viewed as external, artificially imposed constraints which are in conflict with the individual's urge to succeed at all costs. In short, we have to be forced to display the morally desirable characteristics of co-operation, and Darwinism is taken to mean that qualities like love and altruism are, in nature, unreal. Imposed taboos are the sole means of preventing anti-social action and the deterioration into anarchy.

But this is not the only story that evolution offers, nor even the most plausible, although it is the one most people have become inclined to believe. Revisions of evolutionary theory are beginning to emerge, allowing radical readings of the way in which evolution works.²⁷¹ Evolution is not looking to select out 'weak' individuals. It is in fact a very stable mechanism, because, as long as the environment is stable, those species which have survived are actually already well-adapted, so there is no need for change.²⁷² Furthermore, from an evolutionary viewpoint many species (such as the merkat) have survived because they have actively evolved social structures which allow them to co-operate and avoid, not confront, predators.

This model of evolution offers a valuable moral analogy for the contemporary children's writer, because it allows a way of seeing life in which the natural characteristic is one of co-

²⁷¹See Syal (1996); Sambell (1995) p.35.

²⁷²See Meeker (1972) p.33; Gould (1993) pp.275-283.

operation. Kindness is perceived to be inherent because it has survival value : social necessity and individual needs do not conflict. It conceives an optimistic view of human nature in which the re-evaluation of morally desirable qualities is a very real possibility. It is, however, curiously neglected by most contemporary teenage novelists, or it is an imaginative version of evolution which is annexed to a text which has predominantly forwarded a different view.

This version does not deny the potential for human aggression, but it does not assert that humans displaying aggression are necessary victims of the failure of the moral imagination. In this context the expression of necessary violence - the desire to protect one's young or one's social group, for example - is seen as an extension of a completely different nurturant characteristic. It is only sufficient to drive back a perceived threat, not the pathological expression of inherent violence or the eruption of the 'beast within'.²⁷³

The case for such a view of evolution - and, by analogy, the view of human nature it implies - is made by the acclaimed evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould in his essay '10,000 Acts of Kindness'. He argues persuasively against the prevalent view that people are intrinsically aggressive

Many of us have the impression that daily life is an unending series of unpleasantnesses - that fifty percent or more of human encounters are stressful or aggressive. But think about it seriously for a moment. Such levels of nastiness cannot possibly be sustained. (p.280)

Because evolution is a stable mechanism, by analogy

...social stability rules nearly all the time and must be based on an overwhelmingly predominant (but tragically ignored) frequency of genial acts.. geniality is therefore our usual and preferred response nearly all the time. (p.282)

Gould proposes a second, more 'realistic' version of human nature based upon kindness and the ordinary, whose immense power in evolutionary terms is frequently overlooked. Furthermore Gould observes:

²⁷³See Woodward 'On Aggression' in Rabkin ed. No Place Else (1983) pp.199-224.

If I felt that humans were nasty by nature I would just say, the hell with it. We get what we deserve, or what evolution has left us as a legacy. But the centre of human nature is rooted in ten thousand ordinary acts of kindness that define our days..In some deep sense, we do not get what we deserve. The solution to our woes lies not in overcoming our "nature" but in...allowing our ordinary propensities to direct our lives. (p.282)

This view chimes readily with the central cores of meaning of children's literature. What is curious is that so few futuristic children's writers have used future fictional time to 'put the commonplace in the driver's seat of history.' (p.283)

In the remaining chapters I will argue that many children's writers attempt to allow their morally laudable child-characters to survive, attempting to suggest that they can form what amounts to a new, improved species, thus reconceptualising human nature, but that the dystopian framework in which their characters are cast resists the politics of advocacy presented in these terms. In Chapter 2 I will compare Wyndham's work with neo-primitive children's texts, to establish how children's writers often raise daunting questions about the human species, and speculate why most become attracted to the fully dystopian form, in which transformation becomes logically impossible within the narrative itself.

CHAPTER 2

**ESTABLISHING THE TREND FOR PLAUSIBILITY AND PESSIMISM:
REVISING THE CHRYSALIDS' VIEW OF EVOLUTION AND NECESSITY**

The two earliest examples of this type of anxiety fantasy appeared in the form of trilogies: Peter Dickinson's 'Changes' trilogy¹ and John Christopher's 'Sword' trilogy.² These trilogies became the first in a rapidly lengthening list of post-catastrophe narratives for children in which, owing to some cataclysmic event, humanity is predicted to become considerably *less* civilised in the future.³ In each story, the future is imaginatively conceived as a pre-industrial past, a time in which science has not yet created the social, moral and political complexities of modern existence. Each predicts simpler, smaller communities based upon farming or hunting. Man is shown, therefore, to rely heavily upon the natural environment.

This is not presented, however, as a symbolic return to nature as envisaged by exponents of the green 'limits to growth' ideology which was becoming entrenched in the popular consciousness of the time.⁴ There is little evidence of nostalgic optimism in the simpler futures which children's writers envisaged. While it would seem that any pre-industrial era could logically develop in the far-future as a result of the destruction of scientific thought, all the narratives depict the feudalism of the Dark Ages. In all but the 'Sword' trilogy, the positive elements of the feudal ethos are entirely ignored. Life is predicted to become harsh, brutish and violent. Humanity is represented as regressing to a bitter struggle for sheer survival. Superstition, intolerance, ignorance and fear are rife. Small-scale communities become easy prey for brutal, tyrannical leaders.

The consistency of this predictive imaginative strategy suggests that such neo-primitivism is a variation on The Chrysalids⁵ sinister, viciously intolerant and bigoted Post-Tribulation society.⁶ In this chapter I will document examples of these books and contrast their narrative strategies, particularly in their denouements, with those used by Wyndham. I will

¹The Weathermonger (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969. Rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1983); Heartsease (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969, rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1985); The Devil's Children (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970. rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1986).

²The Prince in Waiting (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1970. rpt. 1984); Beyond the Burning Lands (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1971. rpt. 1984); The Sword of the Spirits (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1972. Rpt. 1981).

³ See Glazer, J. (1986) p.283 who observes Christopher's world is 'primitive' and 'ignorant'.

⁴ See, for example, E.F. Schumacher Small is Beautiful (London: Abacus, 1974), soon a best-selling book.

⁵ John Wyndham The Chrysalids (London: Michael Joseph, 1955. Rpt. Penguin, 1978)

⁶ See Peter Hollindale Choosing Books for Children p.100, who states 'this is a book which I believe has exerted a powerful and benign effect on children's fiction.'

particularly focus upon Wyndham's use of evolutionary thought, outlining the narrative strategies it offers, especially its capacity to ultimately provide hope whilst simultaneously recognising the painful truth of the human capacity for bigotry, intolerance and aggression. As a mutation novel The Chrysalids remains entirely optimistic that evolution will result in future biological changes which will ensure the moral improvement of humanity. Wyndham accomplishes this by making the morally desirable species *physically* superior, and by presenting an evolution that primarily acts upon populations rather than individuals. In this way he can show evolution moving in the same direction as moral progress. Children's writers, however, appear compelled to modify Wyndham's apprehension of future human evolution in interesting ways. Almost without exception they seem disposed to suggest that evolution is likely to move in a different direction from the path taken by moral progress. Whereas Wyndham ultimately emphasises the positive aspects of his futuristic vision, children's writers have tended to use the neo-primitive scenario to raise daunting fears about human nature, which their narrative resolutions do little to allay.

In all his major novels Wyndham was preoccupied with the logical possibility that man's supremacy over other living creatures may abruptly end when a lower organism makes a huge step in evolutionary terms. His writing was thus based upon the mutational theory of evolution. He worked within the tradition of the catastrophe novel, which envisaged severe future afflictions facing mankind. The theme of his novels is deceptively simple: the status-quo is overthrown dramatically by some hitherto unanticipated development, and the story follows a group of ordinary people struggling to confront or live with the upheaval.

Wyndham mainly grappled with the psychological possibilities of his heroes' struggles. His earlier narratives were fuelled by the interest in human behaviour when a character attempts to survive the mutated monster (The Kraken Wakes, The Day of the Triffids.) Already in these works the crisis facing mankind is to choose between survival or extinction, yet in these books Wyndham allows man to survive in the interests of the human evolutionary status-quo. The problems of future survival are presented in simple physical and absolute terms: as a species competing with man both the Triffids and the Kraken are nothing but monsters. They must be destroyed if man is to survive at all. Man's choice is therefore

determined purely by the biological necessity of survival. Even the Midwich Cuckoos of his later work are ultimately destroyed as monsters, despite their more complex presentation as highly developed organisms which fundamentally resemble humans.

In The Chrysalids, however, a different situation arises. Wyndham's interest has shifted from the dramatic energy of the conflict between man pitted against the alien or monster at the time of the catastrophe itself, to the far-future repercussions in collective behaviour as a response to a humanly-caused disaster: the nuclear holocaust, or 'Tribulation'. The Chrysalids never attempts to accurately predict the actual outcomes of nuclear hostilities in plausible terms. Instead, Wyndham uses the symbol of the nuclear bomb as a means of explaining an immense evolutionary change in the future of the human species. This time, mutation theory is applied to humanity itself.

The Chrysalids initially concentrates upon the dystopian existence of the Old People, who biologically resemble contemporary humans. But this focus gives way successively to an emphasis on the sense of a visionary utopian reality centred around the New People, whom the child-protagonists, David and Petra, resemble and eventually join. The novel is significantly framed by David's dream-vision of the celestial city of the Apocalyptic tradition: a philosophy which involves the destruction of an old world which gives way to the coming of a new order. David's initial dream proves not to be the lost past, as he first believes, but the reality of the Sealander's radically changed community, in which technology and large populations can live in harmony, due to the ability of biologically mutated individuals to telepathically 'think-together.'

From the beginning of the novel Wyndham apprehends future change, then, as a transformation in the biological form and character of the human self. David and Petra are mutated variations or 'deviants'. While they live in Waknuk their outward appearance is indistinguishable from their parent society, because their biological difference lies in their 'superior quality of mind'. This links them with other 'superior variants', the Sealander's. The children are eventually forced to flee for their lives from the repressive regime of Waknuk.

They join the 'composite team-mind' of the New People, leaving Labrador to start afresh in the Southern hemisphere.

Wyndham explicitly uses the imagery of science to achieve an overall pattern of apocalyptic transformation and to prepare for the imaginative closure of the happy ending. He presents the radical shift in human nature in the literal terms of evolution. He employs scientific classification to emphasise the difference, presenting the Old and New People as entirely different species. In so doing he distorts science to achieve his imaginative purpose. David and Petra are variations, not absolute differences, and share characteristics with the old kind. The extinction of the Old People is not as likely as Wyndham suggests, that is, in terms of biological fact. He insists that they will unequivocally be doomed because of biological failings which make them inflexibly unable to adapt and therefore, ultimately, to survive. He concludes:

They could never have succeeded. One way or another they were foredoomed because they were an inadequate species.(p.157)

Although, as we shall see, the biological failings he describes would be *likely* to make the species more vulnerable, they are not inevitably doomed as Wyndham proposes. Wyndham prefers to suggest that the environment, rather than the 'higher' species, is instrumental in selecting against Joseph's kind. This allows him to maintain the moral integrity of the New species, who are not forced to compete for resources with the Old on a long term basis. By leaving for New Zealand, the Sealanders are not permitted to display anything but minimal violence.

Wyndham's imaginative version of evolution and extinction allows him to form an absolute, physical differentiation between people. This actually underlines what is really their moral behaviourism. Wyndham perceives that evolution can only act upon physical aspects, so by holding their different moral attitudes apart by means of their physical features, he is able to allow evolution to favour one or the other. This enables him to use the facts of evolution, particularly competition and the need to survive, to assert that a single, possible evolutionary future (which is reliant on blind chance) is actually an inevitable one.

Furthermore, he uses evolution to simplify the moral choices his protagonists make in his vision of the future. He employs scientific imagery to evade, or rather mask, the intrinsic moral aspects of his work. His didacticism is thus concealed.

Wyndham's prime purpose is to make it abundantly clear that the 'Old People' are entirely unable to improve, because of their biological kind. Due to their isolated individual natures they proved inadequate in the past:

They lived shut off from each other .. they had to remain individuals...they could not think collectively...They had no means of consensus. They learnt to co-operate constructively in small units; but only destructively in large units. (p.156)

The inevitable result of their inadequacy was the massive destruction of the Bomb.

The book offers several interpretations of this disaster, but all of them perceive it crucially in apocalyptic terms: the old is wiped out to give way to the new. Thus, although the destructive enormity of Tribulation is acknowledged, it is never discredited as a futile annihilation. To David's Uncle Axel, who is of the old biological kind, it is perceived as a God-ordained 'penance' served for human 'arrogance':

"So when they were doing their best to get everything fixed and tidy on some kind of eternal lines they'd thought up for themselves He sent along Tribulation to bust it up and remind 'em that life is change."(p.153)

The Sealand, who is of the new biological kind, believes:

The Old People brought down Tribulation, and were broken into fragments by it... (p.182)

Both views underline the self-destructive nature of the Old People's action, but more importantly, both stress humanity's inability to control its own destiny ('*He sent along Tribulation*' and '*The Old...were broken.*') [My italics]. Ultimately, Wyndham insists that man is not the agent of control. Larger evolutionary forces are at work.

To make this clear, Wyndham depends upon particular scientific imagery (absolute extinction and the absolute segregation of separate species). He relies on presenting the fact

that the disaster precipitates both. Furthermore, both are perceived to be necessary for the evolutionary process to produce a more highly developed organism. The New species is seen to be a biological improvement, in that its complexity makes it more capable of adaptation.

So each character in the novel stresses the positive aspects of Tribulation, seeing in it the hope of a new future. Uncle Axel thinks

He [God] saw it wasn't going to come out the way things lay, so He shuffled the pack to see if it wouldn't give a better break next time...Tribulation was a shake-up to give us a new start. (p.153)

The card metaphor is significant, presenting the random chance inherent in evolution. Here Wyndham allows for the recognition that evolution acts blindly, and that the biological changes and choices he presents form only one among many possible futures. But ideologically he prefers to minimise the possibility of evolutionary divergence. He persistently presents the view that evolution is designed to make a better organism, seeing the overall movement as upward. Uncle Axel's final statement thus carries connotations of inevitable improvement ('a better break', and 'a new start') and is contained by the idea that God fundamentally controls the evolutionary pattern.

Even to the villain, David's brutally repressive father, Joseph, Tribulation provides the catalyst for a 'rediscovery', a 're-ascent'. He believes

The penance of Tribulation that had been put upon the world must be worked out, the long climb faithfully retraced, and, at last, if the temptations by the way were resisted, there would be the reward of forgiveness - the restoration of the Golden Age. Such penances had been sent before: the expulsion from Eden, the Flood, pestilences, the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, the Captivity.(p.40)

Joseph is right to cite these Biblical apocalyptic stories: Wyndham's tactical strategies ensure that the general evolutionary movement that the Bomb precipitates is seen to be unequivocally upwards, like 'a long climb' up a ladder.

Joseph's kind of thinking, however, is determined by his kind, which causes him to fix his hope in a change which is no change. Guided by the pre-Tribulation image of ideal man, he attempts to control the biological future of his own species. He tries to eliminate individuals which do not conform to his past-oriented and fixed image of the human form. Deviants with physical deformities are destroyed at birth, and the process is rationalised by the belief that they are, religiously speaking, 'an abomination'. He translates his stultifyingly fixed beliefs into absolute laws.

Ultimately Joseph's belief in an absolute ideal dooms him, for it signifies his biological incapacity to change and therefore adapt. In evolutionary terms, stasis is deadly. Because of it

Neither his kind, nor his kind of thinking, will survive long. They are the crown of creation, they have nowhere more to go. But life is change, that is its very nature.... The living form defies evolution at its peril, if it does not adapt, it will be broken.

Wyndham exploits the evolutionary paradigm to apparently remove the argument from the moral realm. He attempts to show purely a case of survival. Only the mutated New People have the capacity to 'build for the world that is, rather than the one that's gone.'

Wyndham uses the fact of evolutionary competition to support Joseph's brutal attitude towards his own son. His desire to kill his mutated children stems from natural law: his instinct to preserve his own species. Joseph recognises that deviants are a threat to his kind. The Sealander explains Joseph's apparent callousness:

In loyalty to their kind they cannot tolerate our rise; in loyalty to our kind, we cannot tolerate their obstruction. (p.183)

Joseph cannot help his behaviour, his actions are determined by biological necessity.

But he is fighting life itself by resisting mutational change, and therefore, in Wyndham's view, evolutionary progress. Wyndham uses scientific imagery to convey this ironically: the Old species is inevitably doomed because of its instinct for self-preservation, which leads it

to attempt to make all individuals genetically identical. Joseph is trapped, a victim of his own biological desire to live: his actions curtail the variation upon which evolutionary change truly depends, directly putting his kind in danger of extinction. Thus

...they will attain the stability they strive for, in the only form it is granted - a place among the fossils. (p.182)

Because of Joseph's competitive behaviour David must escape Waknuk. This, too, is an instinctive reaction for self-preservation, determined by biological necessity. By implying that evolutionary change rests upon the extinction of the Old People and by presenting the two species in mutually exclusive terms, Wyndham is never in two minds about the choice David must make. Change and the uncertainty of a new life seem the only meaningful option. The Sealand explains:

"The difference can only be bridged by self-sacrifice: *his* self-sacrifice, for yours would bridge nothing. So, there is the severance. We have a new world to conquer: they have only a lost cause to lose." (p.183)

It is clear that had the children chosen to stay in Waknuk they would have nothing to gain, they could only become victims in a gesture of pointless self-sacrifice. David recalls:

...Aunt Harriet's face in the water...; poor Anne, a limp figure hanging from a beam; Sophie, degraded to a savage, sliding in the dust with an arrow in her neck... Any of these might have been Petra's future. (p.197)

Throughout his depiction of the cruelty of Post-Tribulation society Wyndham appears entirely unconcerned to warn the reader about the consequences of wrongful human action. There is little sense of an admonitory authorial stance, for the Old People are utterly unable to change their behaviour. But in human terms the process of killing deviants is unquestionably cruel, deliberately severing the bonds between parent and child. The separation of Sophie from her parents and the baby from Harriet are presented as calculated atrocities. The suffering caused is so great that Harriet prefers to die, rather than to live with Waknuk's cruelty.

Wyndham's moral teaching is concealed. He covertly represents the differences between Old and New species in moral terms, by packaging biological necessity with moral values. The

New possess biological attributes which not only make them better able to compete and survive, but which make them morally appealing. They are superior in attractive ways. Their marvellous, unpredictable telepathic abilities permit them to think collectively, and thereby behave altruistically and co-operatively. They are able to overcome the competitive individualism of the Old People.

Wyndham presents children as the New People who are able to truly look to the future, and who possess the adaptive flexibility necessary for radical change. The Sealander's world is crucially represented as a morally desirable improvement, an upward moral evolution. It is an ideal dream-vision, and essentially child-like in its appeal. It is described exuberantly in child-like terms as 'awfully exciting'; 'a wonderful place'. Thus it becomes intrinsically associated with the hopeful idealism of aspiring youth. Similarly, the new attributes are referred to as 'the hive mind', the city sounds "not unlike the buzzing of a hive of bees." (p.200) Wyndham deliberately chooses bees, which display co-operative, altruistic behaviour, to suggest desirable values.

The mutants' imaginative quality is importantly associated with their being children, born with the capacity to think radically:

What makes man man is mind; it's not a thing, it's a quality, and minds aren't all the same value; they're better and worse, and the better they are, the more they mean. (p.79)

Wyndham's terms are clearly ideologically loaded. They convey an indisputable sense of progress and improvement which includes desirable moral superiority and optimism. Significantly the youngest child, Petra, has developed the greatest mental capacity. In this novel childhood becomes a potent metaphor for transformation and radical thought.

Because of their kind, the Old behaved badly. 'They aspired greedily, and then refused to face the responsibilities they had created.' (p.156) Telepathy will render their behaviour obsolete: the New will not need to behave in such unattractive ways. The facts of evolution are used to separate the moral differences in absolute terms. Because the Old are seen as

wholly bad, and the New as wholly good, the absolute extinction of the Old becomes not only inevitable, but also desirable, a 'crucifixion which Wyndham welcomes.'⁷ It is the price paid to achieve the new order. Wyndham uses the scientific imagery of competition to evade the moral aspects of David's choice. The Sealander dismisses David's shock and confusion at seeing his own father killed by the New:

It is not pleasant to kill any creature... but to pretend that one can live without doing so is self-deception...It is neither shameful nor shocking that it should be so: it is simply a part of the great revolving wheel of natural economy. (p.195)

Evolutionary necessity has nothing to do with moral choice. The reader is not intended to dispute the simple rationality of this position, for to do so is to resist the opposing absolutes within the text, and the facts of evolution itself.

But the imagery of evolution can only be used metaphorically as soon as it is attached to moral questions. Evolution is simply a measure of biological success, and to link it to moral progress is an imaginative fabrication. Wyndham's optimism relies on his endeavour to fuse the two, and his ability to keep his terms of reference absolute and simple. By these means he can use science to simplify the moral choices available, for science displays no preferences in this arena.

It is easy to see why Wyndham's symbolic use of childhood proved an attractive model for the literary pioneers, Dickinson and Christopher.⁸ Each writer, and those who followed them, depicts idealistic youngsters striving for a better world against repressive, narrow-minded adults. Yet not one shares Wyndham's entirely optimistic imaginative resolution, and few depict his mutation theory in such literal terms.

Peter Dickinson's pioneering early work best exemplifies the general tendency for children's writers to make narrative choices which suppress rather than promote an optimistic presentation of the evolutionary process within the post-catastrophe scenario. Dickinson

⁷John Griffiths *Three Tomorrows* (London, MacMillan, 1980) p. 74.

⁸Wyndham may well have had a direct influence on Christopher's work. In an interview with Gough, Christopher speaks of knowing Wyndham personally, and admiring his work. See John Gough 'An Interview with John Christopher', *CLE* 15, No.2 (Summer 1984) pp.93-102.

was the first major exponent of this particular literary form for children,⁹ and the 'Changes' trilogy received considerable critical acclaim, helping to establish a favourably receptive climate of opinion for this type of futuristic anxiety fantasy.¹⁰

It is particularly telling that Dickinson's trilogy actually appeared in reverse chronological order of its story. The Weathermonger describes the eventual overthrow of the primitive and brutal post-catastrophe era known as the 'Changes', in which men have mysteriously turned against machinery and act with viciously intolerant dogmatism towards anyone who does not share their hatred of technology. The 'Changes' end as abruptly as they began. The book's denouement describes how these disturbing times are suddenly exchanged for more civilised ones. The book's conclusion is clearly intended to provide the reassurance of the return to normality.¹¹ The next book in the sequence, Heartsease, moves further back in the 'Changes' era to explore the hardships of life during the disturbances, whilst the final book, The Devil's Children returns to chronicle events at their very outset, when their influence was strongest. It is as if Dickinson became increasingly imaginatively drawn to the dramatic interest of the dystopian elements of The Chrysalids, particularly the implications of a society committed not to life, but to a deadly stasis. His trilogy reflects the pattern of Wyndham's story, but curiously in reverse order. Each book can be read in isolation from its fellows¹² and in each the levels of pessimism increase substantially.

The Weathermonger most clearly resembles the overall strategy of The Chrysalids, taking up its story *in media res*. It briefly sketches a future England suffering the aftermath of a sudden, unanticipated upheaval which has, like Tribulation, caused a widespread reversion to primitive and brutal patterns of life. Science and technology have been lost, although the mysterious Changes actually cause most humans to revile machinery. Adult society is not described in any detail, but broadly outlined as being inexplicably intolerant of non-

⁹See Peter Hunt (1991) p.142.; Stephens (1992) p.127.

¹⁰See, for example, Townsend Written for Children (1974) p.217; Hollindale (1974) p.100, who describes the trilogy as 'magnificent'; a review in *Growing Point* 7 No.3 (Sept.1969) which views The Weathermonger as 'quite extraordinary and moving...intelligent...and skilful , with a firm relevance to our times.' p.1,174.

¹¹Humphrey Carpenter, for example, observes that Dickinson 'appears to assume...that modern machine-dominated culture is superior to a more primitive life' The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature (OUP, 1984. Rpt. [with corrections] 1991) p. 149.

¹²Townsend op.cit. notes that the books do not truly form a trilogy, p.217.

conformists. Its violent, repressive and savage customs cause it to act reprehensibly and cast out its own children.

The story opens with two children who have been left to drown on a rock in the sea, whilst a crowd of men prevents their escape to shore. This establishes the basic division between adults and children in the novel. The children's literal survival is threatened because of their imaginative difference from adult fixity: Jeff and Sally are entirely free from the fear of machinery that bedevils the adults. In this they resemble David and Petra. The adults clearly resemble Wyndham's Post-Tribulation society. Their regression is similarly signalled by their medieval appearance : 'some were wearing criss-cross leggings and others a sort of sacking kilt.' (p.9) Their behaviour also echoes Joseph's kind: they will kill anyone radically different from themselves. Because of this the children become victims who must flee for their lives.

Jeff resembles David not only in his immunity to adult beliefs, which mark him as capable of moral superiority, but in that he, too, has a new quality of mind. Jeff is a 'weathermonger' who is able to fantastically control the elements purely by means of his enhanced mental capacity. His new psychic capacity hints at David's telepathic biological adaptation, but is more obviously connected with the marvellous. It, too, results from the disaster and facilitates positive action. Jeff is similarly able to use his new qualities to save himself and his sister from execution. He conjures up a thick fog, which blinds their persecutors. The plot, like Wyndham's, follows the children's escape to another country, where they receive help.

In the early stages of the novel, then, the children's differences from adults are indisputable improvements, physically and morally. But Dickinson diverges from Wyndham's premise once this division is established. His children also escape to another country (this time France) where the people have not lost technology and civilisation. The French are immune to the Changes and initially appear to represent the positive strength of the Sealander, rescuing the children and attempting to help them. The French General similarly takes matters into his own hands, resolutely deciding to share the benefits of his technological strength with the children. He gives them a Rolls Royce, which empowers them to travel

quickly and more safely to the source of the Changes, where (in the 'improbable traditions of the simple adventure story')¹³ they are, at a surface level, able to put an end to the troubles and release England from its regression. The plot moves towards the ultimate restoration of moral order and the affirmation of a final safety. But the 'absurdities' of such a simple resolution are at odds with the 'deeper implications of the Changes.'¹⁴ The Weathermonger is extremely uneven, and is characterised by conflicting ideological messages operating within the text, which Dickinson finally chooses to resolve, suddenly and simplistically. The ending has been the source of much critical disapproval.¹⁵

The inherent ideological complexities can be seen in the portrayal of the General, for instance. He enables the children to become redeemer figures who, unlike David, do not reject the adults who cast them out, but return to change them. Dickinson thereby signals the moral superiority of his child-protagonists, whose altruistic, civilised behaviour can actively engender adult change. But by expecting the children to return to the dangers of their original home, the General is not unequivocally benign, like the Sealanders. Instead, he becomes a morally ambiguous figure, who is used to raise daunting questions about mankind. The children's reservations about him escalate:

At first Geoffrey had worshipped him, a magnificent manifestation of absolute will... but then he'd found himself puzzled by the great man's actual motives: the readiness to slaughter a couple of kids on the chance of pulling off a far-fetched coup; the cheerful suggestion of blotting out half a happy county with missiles...(p.45)

Here Dickinson expresses serious qualms about the moral rectitude of using violence and the readiness to kill defenceless people. These doubts stem from the fear that life is dominated by the evolutionary force of ruthless competition. Morality and evolution are not necessarily consistent with each other. In fact, Dickinson suggests, they are likely to prove contradictory.

Dickinson's portrayal of the General consciously raises the possibility that humanity is unable to change and improve because of its own worst nature. In many ways he is as

¹³Carpenter (1991) p.148.

¹⁴Carpenter (1991)p.149.

¹⁵Townsend claims it comes a 'sorry tumble' at the end (1974) p.217; Hollindale says it is 'highly improbable' p.101.; Carpenter feels the ending is 'inherently absurd' p.419.

morally suspect as the adults from whom the children initially fled. His attitude is important, casting a shadow over the whole narrative. He, too, is prepared to 'slaughter' the children because of his beliefs. He desires the re-establishment of an old order, rather than the forward-looking new vision represented by the Sealanders. He sees the disaster in the negative terms of a sickness: he wants to violently 'cauterize the disease' with the very technology against which the English have turned. There is no suggestion of the 'more merciful' means used by the Sealanders. The General is selfish and ruthless, an exaggerated version of England's adult society.

Dickinson chooses to carry his moral meaning by having the children not simply escape, but by showing their moral quest and their ability to overcome the negative characteristics of *all* adults by means of their altruistic moral actions. These symbolic children are different and superior beings. Ultimately they discover the cause of the disaster. The legendary figure of Merlin, having been exhumed and awoken by a comically banal chemist, Mr. Furbelow, has become drug-dependent and confused. Upset by modernity and an unrecognisable world, he has magically cast a spell which causes it to revert to his own more primitive times.

Merlin becomes a ludicrous and clumsy device by which to achieve the successful resolution of the children's moral quest. His Changes are suddenly cancelled when Jeff and Sally bravely teach Furbelow the wickedness of trying to harness Merlin's power for his own gain. The chemist admits

I discovered I had been blind and selfish. I tried to use him... to bind him to me with a habit-forming drug, so that he would have to do whatever I wished... It was a sinful thing to do. (p.163)

The children become the active agents of hope, and hope is deliberately rooted in the moral sphere. They thus represent an upward moral evolution. Dickinson hopes to assert a simple truth: that all human behaviour can be changed for the better by Jeff and Sally's good example. Their selfless behaviour is rewarded when Merlin is freed to resume his sleep and normality is happily restored. This hugely implausible denouement results, however, in bathos, which is entirely at odds with the serious anxieties about the defects in biological

human nature raised by the preceding text. The inconsistency of tone is artistically damaging, leaving the sense that Merlin's magic is being used perfunctorily to dismiss the plausible fears Dickinson has hitherto generated. It is a simplistically conceived annexed ending, for which the reader is largely unprepared.

Merlin is actually an unsatisfactorily confused and contradictory figure throughout. As the catalyst for the Changes he directly caused Jeff's weather-making capacity. He is thus presented as an active agent of radical and positive change. Dickinson significantly suggests that this change is associated with an evolutionary progress which resembles the upward mutational leap of The Chrysalids. Merlin is a superior kind of being, 'a new kind of creature... a mutant...an improvement on the existing species.' (p.161)

Furthermore, the evolutionary potential of his extraordinary psychic capacity lies dormant in all humanity:

"Did you know there was a great big bit of your mind you don't use at all?" [Furbelow asks Jeff.] "Nobody knows what it's for... I think perhaps that man's next bit of evolution might be to learn to use that part of his brain, and that would give him powers he doesn't have now." (p.162)

This suggests that Merlin's powers are not magical, but are in fact due to biological adaptation. As a mutant his phenotype is markedly different: he is 'a funny rusty colour' and he has hair on the palms of his hands. He is a creature of the future, waiting for more of his own kind. Dickinson uses evolution to suggest an upward rise along Wyndham's lines. He implies that Man has not made this jump yet, but it will come. In this context the children's alliance with Merlin, and particularly Jeff's enhanced psychic powers, assume a similar stature. They represent a positive biological progress akin to Wyndham's.

But Merlin has formerly been seen as the catalyst of disaster. His Changes have directly caused the regressive behaviour of the English. Merlin is also a creature of the past, and the simplicity of his enforced reversion is undeniably limiting in moral terms, too. Paradoxically the Changes are not changes at all. They simply mark humanity's similarities to the crudely undesirable behaviour of earlier times, which, as in Golding's Lord of the Flies, 'civilisation'

masks. As the children travel through England, for example, they are stoned and persecuted mercilessly and senselessly. In this way the Changes are unequivocally undesirable, and must be stopped. Merlin's mutated psychic powers do not make him a morally improved being, merely different.

A contradictory spectrum of ideas is in play. Dickinson chooses to close down the idea of Merlin's evolutionary potential in order to achieve the children's moral success. But by cancelling Merlin's magic the children also close off their own positive evolutionary variations. Jeff loses his psychic powers as Merlin is restored to sleep. This is a sacrifice Jeff regrets, but it indicates his elevation of moral choice over biological adaptation. The two spheres are ultimately seen in antagonistic terms. To choose one is to deny the other.

The contradictions are not satisfactorily resolved. Paradoxically the children have restored adults to the state of normality that the French General characterised. If Dickinson hoped to show that his child-protagonists could supersede the behaviour of adults by exercising desirable moral choice, elements of his narrative techniques contradict his didactic aims. The children do not grow and change, and at the end of the novel human nature has not really changed at all. By resisting the possibility of biological change in favour of moral change, Dickinson ironically traps Jeff within the limitations of a seriously flawed species. His moral meaning is clouded and confused.

As if to evade the inherent confusions and complex motivations which underpin The Weathermonger, Dickinson largely ignores Merlin's role in his next two works. The importance of the fantastic mutational elements are marginalised in favour of more plausible, predictable scenarios. The second book consequently has a much more serious tone. Heartsease portrays the brutality of post-disaster village life to more explicitly violent, shocking effect than The Weathermonger. It describes the implications of intolerance and aggression, sparing little horror. Adult society is presented as markedly more culpable than that of the earlier book. We are shown the sheer delight with which adults persecute their victims: "...mark you... witch-hunting was good sport - better than cock-fighting." (p.93)

This sadistic pleasure results in the stoning of an American spy who has come to try and discover the causes of the Changes. The villagers leave him for dead: "His face was an ugly mess of raw flesh, his lips fat with bruising." (p.16). Human aggression is no longer inexplicable, but clearly associated with innate cruelty. Later in the book it is described as 'a lust in us'. The reader who has not read The Weathermonger is likely to deduce that the villagers act as they do because they exemplify flawed humanity. As a species humanity is woefully unable to regulate its aggressive biological urges, and even perverts them. These are 'mankind's true colours, simply seen for what they are.'¹⁶

Dickinson clearly adopts an admonitory position early in this work, and The Weathermonger's vigorous sense of child-like fun and adventure is lost. But again only the adults behave badly, the children are presented as foils to this culpable moral degeneration. Like Jeff, they do not share the adults' hatred of machinery and do not accept the need for human cruelty. Dickinson separates and distinguishes them from the might of adult society, against which they are pitted, to underline the differences between the moral behaviour of the two groups. Yet the children do not possess Jeff's magical abilities: they must instead succeed purely by dint of their moral superiority. In Heartsease Dickinson's didacticism relies on his diminishing the distance between his child and adult characters. He rejects the mutational leap of his first book in favour of a gradual change, because this allows the characters to appear to exercise control over their own futures.

The basic division between children and adults is deliberately less dramatic. It "might be something to do with children's minds... Not being so set in their ways of thinking." (p.48) Like Wyndham, Dickinson deliberately uses childhood to symbolise a flexible capacity to adapt and change. But Dickinson stresses that this is more to do with attitude, behaviour and belief, rather than biological differences of kind. The children are compared with adults ('not being so set..') rather than contrasted. He hopes to prepare the reader for the work's eventual conclusion: that the initial child/adult conflict is one that can *convincingly* be bridged by desirable moral action.

¹⁶Hollindale (1974) p.101.

Following Wyndham's pattern, the children escape the village once they are faced with the choice of accepting its premises or rejecting them. They find that the American 'witch', Otto, is still barely alive after his stoning. Realising the full implications of their actions, they decide to help him escape. They choose to leave home and face personal danger by using machinery to hide him. Ultimately they take him by the small, battered tug 'Heartsease' to the sea and safety. In doing this they risk being killed as witches themselves.

The villagers are initially represented in absolute and appalling terms and superficially this severance between children and adults still resembles Wyndham's. Like David, the children have always hidden their variation - their ability to think freely - and eventually they are forced to leave in the necessity to survive. David, however, escaped purely to save his life, but in Heartsease the actual severance between children and adults only occurs because the children's differences in kind specifically cause them to take moral action. Dickinson uses their altruism to signal the desirability of their variations.

But it gradually becomes apparent that his attempt to portray moral improvement as evolutionary change results in a tactical dilemma. Because the children have no physical advantages, they are particularly vulnerable in terms of evolutionary necessity. In fact, although their moral supremacy is desirable, it actually diminishes their chances of literal survival. By provoking altruistic behaviour, based upon love, tolerance and compassion, it makes the children 'frail and fragile' in a world predominantly governed by the survival of the fittest.

They become increasingly associated with the symbol of heartsease, a pioneering wild flower (which man significantly regards dismissively as a weed). The plant represents hope in its ability to survive against significant odds, but can so easily be destroyed by man, who disregards it, because it appears to serve no 'useful' function. Like the children, it needs an undisturbed environment in which to thrive. It populates the moors and naturally reclaims 'the strip of last year's ploughland', but here, competing with man, its vulnerability is striking:

She kept looking at them, so frail and delicate, but fluttering undamaged above the stony tilth.(p.185)

The natural laws of competition resist the most hopeful lines of prediction in the novel. There is a fundamental tension, then, between what is desirable, and what is probable. It is possible the heartsease, like the children, will survive, but it is far from probable. Their survival depends upon chance, in the slim possibility that they are not forced to compete for resources with stronger individuals.

As in The Weathermonger Dickinson remains committed to portraying the child as redeemer. He has one child, Margaret, return home to heal village society, although the others escape from England entirely. Dickinson is keen to show that Margaret's altruism has the power to release the villagers' better nature, so precipitating their conscious moral evolution. On Margaret's return, the village is seen in a new light. It is no longer portrayed in the absolute terms of a lost cause, like Wyndham's Old People. Dickinson's earlier pessimistic version of human nature was presented as a warning - illuminating the shocking consequences of immoral human action. Later it gives way successively to a view in which the villagers are able to control their baser 'lusts', because these are now seen as a sickness which can be cured. The cure lies in the wilful idealism of the children's moral gesture.

In order to make this sudden change seem plausible, Dickinson locates the village's 'disease' predominantly in its political leadership. We find that adults acted as they did because they felt unable to compete with the power and dominance of a strong individual, Davey Gordon.

The whole village was sick. But you couldn't fight Davey Gordon and his gang, because nobody would dare stand up for you. It was better to belong with them. (p.58)

This is not merely culpable apathy, it reflects the belief that in a world of competition, those individuals displaying the traits of aggression and physical strength are likely to prevail. In Dickinson's narrative moral objection thus relies upon the power to 'fight'.

This is, paradoxically, at odds with the altruistic values of the children. Dickinson finds that he must reluctantly try to package moral satisfaction with biological chance and necessity in order to secure an overall narrative pattern which reflects his didactic moral purpose. Davey Gordon must die before the village can be freed from his influence. Dickinson, like Wyndham, attempts to suggest Gordon's death is inevitable, a self-inflicted extinction due to his obsolete values:

..if he's dead, he killed himself. Something like this was going to happen for sure. He'd have pushed someone too far... and they'd have gone for him with a billhook. (p.158)

Gordon's death is seen to function as a sacrifice which bridges the essential differences between child and adult worlds in the same way that Joseph's did. It then becomes desirable and he is 'Best dead'. (p.151)

The facts of Gordon's death show it to be far from inevitable, however. Instead it relied upon pure and improbable chance. Whilst the children were trying to escape from the murderous villagers Margaret cut free a tethered bull to impede their pursuers. The bull charged into the crowd, giving the children time to escape. Margaret's act was necessary to their literal survival. Unbeknown to her (and a little too luckily) the bull killed Gordon.

Moreover, this means that Gordon actually died as a direct result of Margaret's actions to save Otto. The elements of chance and Margaret's responsibility are at odds with the idea of the conscious, upward moral evolution of the children. Margaret recognises her 'guilt' with horror:

Yes .. but it was me.

She is unable to reconcile her moral position with biological necessity, because, unlike David, she is not fundamentally different in kind from either the villagers, or Gordon. Despite Dickinson's aim of presenting a hope embedded in conscious moral improvement, Heartsease's denouement still rests uneasily upon the element of pure chance inherent in Gordon's death. This narrative choice was forced by Dickinson's portrayal of a human species with an inherently divided nature, which can choose between its better or worst

aspects to create its own moral evolution, developing gradually along Darwinian lines of change. These tactics result in a tension which Wyndham's sudden and discontinuous mutational change evaded, and which Dickinson can only resolve by resorting to the unpredictable chance inherent in biological evolution itself.

The basic dilemma in Heartsease was that the children's moral difference made them vulnerable, so in his next book Dickinson appeared to choose a child-protagonist who is on more equal terms with her adult counterparts. Dickinson removes the possibility that Nicky might, like Jeff, be radically different in biological kind. She is the only child in the trilogy who is affected by the Changes. Her differences are then unequivocally located in the moral choices she takes. The narrative is shaped around the internal competition between her best and worst nature.

Nicky is left alone and frightened in the immediate aftermath of the Changes. She is adopted by a band of travelling Sikhs to act as their 'canary', for they are unaffected, and therefore unable to sense nearby machinery or electricity, which cause dangerously violent reactions in the English. As a different race, rather than species, the Sikhs embody the hope of civilised society. This key narrative tactic (pitting two societies against each other) raises overtly political questions, at least at the level of the book's surface ideology. This is more akin to the narrative strategies adopted by the classic dystopians, which I aim to consider in the next chapter. In this way Dickinson replaces the choice between survival and extinction with the choice between civilisation and savagery. The Sikhs strive for democracy, in total opposition to the feudalism of the English, whose leaders dominate by brute force and fear. Feudalism is effective, however, because "Most people prefer to have their thinking/ done for them. Democracy is not a natural growth, it is a weary responsibility." (pp.88/89) Hope lies in the individual's conscious regulation of man's 'natural' impulses.

This opposition, between the 'natural growth' of instinctive aggression, competition and physical violence (demonstrated by the feudal villages) and the 'weary responsibility' of the rational, egalitarian democracy of the Sikhs forms the basic division in the novel. Whereas

the villagers act amorally, guided by an impulse to compete for resources and use violence to achieve their needs, the Sikhs act morally, co-operating rather than invading.

The Sikhs embody a potential human futurity which is morally desirable. Dickinson urges that it should be possible for children to emulate them. Nicky gradually learns a moral obligation to tolerate and value the variations between peoples from the Sikhs' good example. But the spheres of morality and biological necessity again provide a source of conflict in Dickinson's work. In physical terms the Sikhs are less well adapted to life in a newly violent and competitive world. They are soon threatened by raiders from the village. Forced by the biological necessity to survive, they must fight.

Nicky joins the fight, but because she is represented in precisely the same terms as primitivized humanity, the choice she makes is purely one of morality. Nicky is flawed, but hope lies in her ability to transcend the savage condition, choosing to fight not because she is personally threatened, but on a point of principle. She fights to defend the political freedoms of the Sikhs.

Dickinson's tactical dilemma, however, is to distinguish Nicky's violence from that of the feudal aggressors, and to ensure that the (child) reader perceives that it is traceable to an entirely different characteristic. Throughout the trilogy he has gradually adopted a narrative form in which it is difficult to clearly separate good and bad. Because of her similarity with them, Nicky is equally subject to their moral danger. She glories in her conquest, thus tainting herself with the cruelty of the brutal robber-knight who terrorises the Sikhs. Her actions echo those of this youth, who has adapted too well to the violent Changes' world:-

...he was scarce more than a boy. And when he saw Arthur's head dripping up there on a pole, he laughed like a lover.(p.119)

Following her battle-victory Nicky rides the same robber-knight's horse:

She rested the cruel cleaver across her lap, straightened her back and neck and rode like a queen.

The exultation of victory thrilled through her blood.../ Now she knew why the robber knight had laughed like a lover as he clove... The same glory was in him; but in him it had gone rancid. (pp.145/146)

Nicky is created as a device to carry the didactic moral point. She is dangerously susceptible to her own worst nature, but hope lies in her ability to control the instinctive thrill of aggression by an effort of conscious will. She represents the flaw in human biology which must be overcome. This level of warning bears a greater resemblance to the dark vision of human nature conceived by Golding in Lord of the Flies, than to Wyndham's in The Chrysalids. Nicky is justified in her violence, for she must fight in 'bad times'. But the novel's educational responsibility lies in this being perceived as dangerous. The Sikh Grandmother warns:

Nicky, you are in danger...It is inside you...you have made yourself harder and fiercer than any of us. In bad times you have to wear armour round your heart, but when times are better you must take it off. Or it becomes a prison for your soul. (p.154)

The real battle is thus located in the divisions within the individual human self. Nicky can, potentially, act upon this advice and conquer her worst nature by self-regulation. But on the terms of the novel this remains a 'weary responsibility', a far cry from the dream-like 'new world' achieved at the end of The Chrysalids. Ultimately hope rests on moral principle, rather than the dramatically mutated self. Because Dickinson's didacticism rests upon admonition, it risks the suggestion that humanity's worst characteristics seem dominant: those likely to prevail in evolutionary terms. The world of nature predictably holds little comfort in the terms of the narrative.

Because Dickinson has increasingly resisted Wyndham's version of change based on extinction and discontinuous biological change, relying instead upon moral evolution, evolutionary pessimism dominates the final narrative. My exploration of the text's passive ideology, contained within the evolutionary metaphor, reveals that, at deep imaginative levels, the book emphasises the predictability of moral failure. The Sikhs' ideal community remains essentially vulnerable, for instance.

Dickinson uses an unresolved sherd-like ending in which Nicky is sent to find solace with her own family, who may be alive or dead. Her 'victory' is temporary, a far cry from the happy conclusion of The Weathermonger. The emphasis is firmly placed upon her growth and personal change, and the overall narrative shape repudiates, or at least radically qualifies, the final security of the first novel in the series. Nicky's story is a *bildungsroman*, in which she learns to come to terms with social life and leaves the novel to travel on, changed, to adulthood. The novel seems to imply an older audience than that of the Weathermonger.¹⁷ The 'open' unwritten nature of the conclusion does not exclude the possibility that Nicky will finally return home to her parents. But it seems unlikely. The final focus is placed upon the morally admirable Sikhs, explicitly articulating an alternative to the unattractive social organisations we have seen in the preceding novel. They, like Nicky, find temporary solace from their tormentors. But the last sentence warns rather than comforts: "Outside these few fields we are still the Devil's children."

These levels of pessimism are by no means an idiosyncrasy of Dickinson's. Almost all children's writers remain in two minds about human nature and the future it will probably shape, which causes a fundamental tactical paradox. By trying to portray a sense of worth, as well as anxiety, in the human self they struggle to overcome the domination of evolutionary pessimism in their stories.

Christopher's debt to The Chrysalids is, if anything, clearer than Dickinson's. In one sense the setting and the plot faithfully replicate Wyndham's.¹⁸ The Sword trilogy is set in a future world which has 'crashed into ruins'. The reasons for the catastrophe are deliberately plausible. Huge environmental upheavals have occurred, and despite the fact that these were entirely natural, Man has guiltily and irrationally rejected science and technology. As a result, Man has regressed. Religious dogma, superstition and violence dominate the primitive existence of the survivors, who live in fortified Cities which are governed by feudal lords. These are bloody times, ruled by the sword. People are driven by fear and mistrust, for life is literally a constant struggle for sheer survival. Cities compete in battle

¹⁷A review in Growing Point 9, No. 5 (1970) p. 1, 636 notes that Dickinson's first work is for 'younger readers', because of the magical resolution.

¹⁸See Hollindale (1974) p. 101, who claims his work 'is even more clearly in line of descent from The Chrysalids' than Dickinson's.

with each other, factions compete within each City, individuals compete within the political hierarchies.

Like Wyndham, Christopher presents a first-person narrative. The story is told by Luke, who, like David, is caught at the point of transition from primitive to more complex states of existence. Luke similarly discovers that the religious dogma which has dominated his upbringing is misguided and false. Spiritism is discredited by a group of men -the Seers- who have secretly maintained knowledge of technology and science. They make Luke see Spiritism is a lie that they deliberately perpetrate to control the Cities. Politically and physically they are a massively more powerful people. They remove Luke from his ignorant, primitive existence, investing him with the benefits of a cool, detached rationalism and the strength that their scientific knowledge affords. In this the Seers resemble the Sealanders.

The plot follows Luke's transition from life in the City of Winchester to life with the Seers. The Seers may represent hopeful change, like their literary predecessors. Their technological strength is capable of deterring actual violence, rendering the old bloody battles obsolete. Primitive behaviour is equally needless insofar as their enhanced communicative powers may allow them to think collectively. Their scientific rationality achieves a level of civilisation which is impossible for the primitive City-dwellers, to whom television seems magical and whose mistrust of science ensnares them in irrationality and competitive individualism. Like Joseph's kind, the Old seem only capable of acting destructively in large units. The Seers are able to transcend the divisions caused by prejudice and superstition which are rife in primitive life. They unite all races - dwarf, human and polymuf - with equal status.

They, too, may be seen in the benign role of parents simply caring for their vulnerable young:-

...they thought they could wean men from superstition and back to science. (Beyond the Burning Lands p.16)

Here Christopher departs from Wyndham's narrative tactics. Like Dickinson, he shows the superior New people attempting to redeem the Old. Their first step is to choose Luke to spearhead their campaign. They intend to unite the Cities under his leadership.

But the Cities resist unification and, like Joseph's kind, try to fight, despite their unequal terms. It is clear that the Seers' strengths mean that they have a new world to conquer, the Cities have only a lost cause to lose. The primitive old is no match in the struggle for survival. At the end of the trilogy Luke, having left the City of Winchester and joined the Seers, reflects upon the apparent inevitability of this change:-

We shall conquer them because we represent the strength of the future, and they the past which must always bow to it. It will happen because it must... (Sword of the Spirits p.152)

Furthermore, the inevitability of this resolution is rooted, like The Chrysalids, in the laws of natural economy. The vectors of evolutionary change - competition and adaptation - dominate the narrative.

In these ways the Sword Trilogy appears to replicate The Chrysalids. But, like Dickinson, Christopher resists the absolutism of Wyndham's divisions between Old and New. The inequalities of the two groups lies solely in their values and their physical strength. The differences are not biological, so there is no radical shift in the form and nature of the human self. However dramatic the differences may appear, both groups remain distinctly human. By deliberately diminishing the gap, the reader is invited to see the links, as well as the differences, between Old and New. Their motivations may be extremely similar.

Like Dickinson, Christopher is in two minds about human nature, and argues with himself within the narrative. This leads him to portray the worth and the flaws in the human self.¹⁹ He questions Wyndham's unequivocal notion of 'progress'. He suggests instead that the Cities' feudal ethos has strongly desirable qualities which are threatened by the Seer's plan.

¹⁹A review in Growing Point 10, No.5 (1971) p.1839 responds to this darker aspect. It considers that Christopher portrays a 'backward evolution', which 'offers us a fresh look at the deficiencies of our society and our species.'

As a result multiple readings are made available. The Seers may be sinister and manipulative. They exercise their power in morally suspect ways, secretly murdering anyone who stands in the way of their 'larger plan' to unite the Cities, even if the obstacle is a defenceless woman or child. They use 'treachery and deceit' to secure their goals, and think nothing of mass slaughter on entirely unequal terms. They are prepared to exterminate those Cities who resist their attempts at unification with Sten guns and mortar attacks.

Christopher encourages his reader to view the negative, as well as the positive aspects of the Seers' rise. This is a much more complex narrative contract than the one employed by Wyndham. Christopher consistently creates a much more 'open' relationship with his reader, not simply in the 'open' ending, like Dickinson, but throughout the entire text. The complexities of his narrative strategies can most clearly be seen in the character of his main protagonist. Like Dickinson, Christopher chooses to portray a divided individual, thus highlighting the consequences of moral choice on behalf of his young readership. Christopher constructs his story around a series of choices that Luke must make while changing from Old to New. Unlike David, who had only one meaningful choice, Luke has many. Some appear to be unimportant at the time, but each profoundly affects the narrative future, often in unpredictable ways. Luke mimics the process of evolution itself. But because Christopher solely portrays metaphorical evolution, he is also able to recognise the exercise of moral choice involved in Luke's decisions. In fact Christopher's didacticism relies upon guiding the reader to acknowledge the moral sphere. He warns against the dangers of a scientific view which is used by humans to excuse or evade the moral aspects of their decisions. To do this he importantly allows the reader to decide whether Luke's choices are actually desirable, but eventually guides each reader to a 'safety-net' point at which she must perceive their moral aspect. He creates a vast spectrum of available readings which will range between two extreme views of Luke himself.

Wyndham encourages his reader to sympathise wholly with David, who is a largely powerless child-victim of biological circumstance. Luke, however, is a much more complex character. In some respects he is a victim of others' mistrust, but he also has the personal power - the will and aggression - to manipulate others. Whilst some of his attributes make

him likeable, he has some characteristics which alienate the reader's sympathies. Most importantly, he is always able to exert some measure of control over the nature of his own evolution, because it is purely metaphorical.

For the sake of brevity I will arrange the spectrum of possible readings around two imaginary caricatured implied readers: one who is sophisticated and capable of responding to irony, and one who is naive and presumed to adopt a more literal 'surface' interpretation. A caricatured naive reader may, for example, literally accept the 'surface' suggestion that Luke is entirely honourable. He is brave, powerful and admirably determined to succeed, perfectly adapted to life in a hostile world. He represents the best of Old and New worlds. He gains the Princeship of Winchester by personal merit, winning a knightly tournament in the old ways because of his agility and intelligence, which helps him to think quickly in dangerous situations. When his father is treacherously murdered by a neighbouring City, Luke courageously assumes the mantle of leader, despite his youth. He chooses to fire the corn of the offending City, an act which contravenes all the rules of the feudal ethos, but by doing so he successfully defeats Winchester's opponents. He always acts to protect Winchester, but his leadership is betrayed by a group of jealous Captains, who treacherously try to usurp his rightful rule. Luke has no choice but to flee, yet is entirely justified in returning later to reclaim his throne by force. Throughout each novel this reader sees that Luke is constantly betrayed, and therefore justly uses his power to rectify the wrongs done to him. When he is told that his bride-to-be, Blodwen, cares for his best friend, Edmund, he responds to this betrayal by using his Princely powers to banish Edmund.

This reader may also believe that Luke does not act solely for personal pride, but because he serves a 'higher' goal. His aim to unite the Cities will invest all people with a better lifestyle. There is no understanding of the complexity of Luke's choices, and this interpretation sees Luke's development in terms of his ascending a ladder of improvement. The reader may use the logic of evolution to posit that Luke has no real choice. The facts of competition in the necessity to survive may be used to evade the moral aspects of Luke's choices (as Luke himself perceives).

In the final resolution Christopher ultimately forces this reader, and Luke, to perceive Luke as others see him. Luke is an untrustworthy narrator, whose point of view is not necessarily correct. Luke's choices have escalated until a point at which he seems prepared to use the Seers' sophisticated weaponry to conquer Winchester. Ultimately he finds he cannot give the order to fire when he sees the people of Winchester repairing the breached walls of his old city with their living bodies. Faced by the moral courage of such helpless passive resistance, Luke stops to reflect upon the consequences of his actions. He is unable to entirely reject his old ways, for they have contributed to his present self. He no longer views the inevitable rise of the Seers as necessarily desirable, because "...to the Seers such things as honour and glory were of no importance in themselves... Honour was something which had touched my life for as long as I could remember." (p.16) Luke suddenly recognises the waste involved in a process which acts ruthlessly and selfishly, regardless of a moral dimension. He sees Winchester's point of view, preferring their Old ways:-

If killing there must be I would rather it were done by a warrior who kills with his own hand, and knows what bloody corpse he leaves behind. (p.149)

But in the end he can no longer act. The reader who valued Luke for his old-fashioned loyalty and bravery is thus strongly urged to appreciate his revised ideological position, and to question the ambiguous presentation of 'progress'.

At the other extreme is the sophisticated reader (whom Christopher prefers). This reader always recognises the flaws in Luke's character and can see that he is impetuous and opportunistic, seizing upon the means which seem to achieve his purpose most immediately. This is not entirely excused as necessary altruistic action, but viewed as selfish and foolishly impetuous. Luke's pride prevents him from realising that other people have a valid point of view. The Seers choose him because he is a 'good hater': his ambition will lead him to take personal revenge on his opponents. He is a hypocrite who will stop at nothing to achieve his will. He uses trickery to win the tournament. His firing of the corn demonstrates that he is prepared to uphold merely those customs that suit his purpose. Luke's attempt to justify it as necessary violence is morally suspect, probably motivated by personal pride. Moreover it is a dangerous precedent to choose to make.

By acting in this opportunistic fashion, Luke relentlessly pursues a wasteful and limiting course, unable to perceive the damaging implications of his actions. He ironically actually causes the desirable aspects of the feudal ethos to become obsolete. He is a threat, and the Captains are justified in their attempt to depose him, because as a tyrant he threatens their freedoms, and even their very survival. But Luke's rationale, which sees only competition and the sheer necessity to survive, is blind to all but his own perspective.

Luke's choices may be governed by a revenge which has little to do with honour, and more to do with a negative personal bitterness. He cannot bear public humiliation. His pride and jealousy make him overreact to Blodwen's supposed infidelity. He sees everything as a competition, which makes him insensible to all else. He characteristically uses force to remove Edmund as a competitor, even though he has scant evidence of his relationship with Blodwen. His impetuous behaviour makes him choose badly. Like evolution itself he fails to plan ahead, and what looks like short-term gain ironically causes him long-term harm. He realises too late that by choosing to force Blodwen's love he actually lost it:-

I might still have won her ... In defeat I might have conquered. (Sword of the Spirits p.75)

Luke's conduct means that the wasted opportunities only become clear in retrospect. By choosing one particular moral path, Christopher makes Luke feel the loss necessarily incurred.²⁰ When faced with the admirable passive resistance of his own people he does register the consequences of his earlier choices, because he is 'a blind man, not a cruel one'. This reader's sympathies are ensured when at last Luke chooses to exercise moral choice and self-regulation, deciding not to fire upon the city. He learns to shun apparent necessity, and conquers his own worst nature in defeat. Ultimately he exchanges his beliefs in a warrior-mentality for a new irenic insight.²¹

²⁰One reviewer has responded to Luke's ambiguous character: 'The hero is seen to be not an idealistic, extrovert warrior but an introvert with a crippling uncertainty about his own life. A hero for our times, perhaps?' Growing Point 10, No.9 (1971) p.1,922.

²¹ibid. The ending leaves 'a sad ambiguity which is certainly honest but makes an oddly evasive ending to an initially active, romantic hero-tale.'

The preferred reader is in two minds about Luke, and these hopes and fears will extend to all the humans in the trilogy. Because Christopher has chosen not to portray literal evolution, he has adopted a mode of telling which can only prophesy rationally possible human change within the constraints of a flawed biological self. Although hopeful interpretations are made available, the first-person narration amplifies the limitations of the individual self. The narrative viewpoint exemplifies Luke's habitual incapacity to communicate, which results in his mistrust and his inability to co-operate. This is a biological problem of kind, but the hope of change relies upon the exercise of moral choice.

The dilemma Christopher faces is that his narrative mode has trapped him into portraying moral and evolutionary necessity in mutually exclusive terms. By choosing a moral victory, Luke chooses personal and physical defeat. Although his example may have hopeful outcomes (he prevents the Seers from immediately crushing the Cities, for instance) each reader must also recognise Luke's final sense of loss and sad resignation:-

[Change] will happen because it must. But I am in no hurry to see it. (p152)

Luke's action is self-defeating, even self-destructive. It marks the end of his own evolutionary line. The trilogy closes with his resigned recognition of his failure to survive in biological terms: "But I shall have no son." It seems the Seers will conquer in future, but we never know whether this will be for good or ill. Christopher has oscillated between two simultaneously attractive and unattractive ideologies, and the open-ending reposes trust in the reader to perceive the good and bad in each, and to subject each to scrutiny. It seems likely that most readers will respond to the pessimistic rather than optimistic implications of the work, particularly the sherd-like resolution,²² despite the narrative's remarkable resemblance to The Chrysalids. The interpretations of most critics testify to this fact.²³

²²One reviewer notes 'the pessimistic ending to the book ... [shows that] Christopher predicts that man may never find his potential' Growing Point op.cit. p.1,922.

²³ Townsend in Written for Children observes that 'Christopher is, one suspects, rather inclined to pessimism' ;Glazer & Williams (1979) note that 'as scientific sophistication grows near the end of the story, so does cynicism' p.283; Hugh and Maureen Crago 'John Christopher: An Assessment with Reservations' Children's Book Review 1 No.3 (June 1971)p.77 regard his 'pessimism as too facile' and feel his characters are too wooden to express his ideas adequately.

A number of writers followed Dickinson's and Christopher's lead, basing their novels around neo-primitive futures. If anything, the pessimistic tone of these two influential trilogies is amplified by the later works, despite their authors' apparent efforts to the contrary. The hope of positive change becomes less and less likely in narrative terms as authors persistently reject the depiction of literal mutational evolution in favour of metaphorical evolution, achieving the overtly political focus of dystopian writing.

In Torch²⁴ Jill Paton Walsh portrays a future in which a group of children escape from a repressive home community to search for a better one. Her didactic objective is to show that hope lies in the upward moral evolution of these children. They discover and rekindle the Olympic torch, which they carry on their quest. Their journey takes them through various communities, each of which stages a festival of games. At each festival the children hope that they have discovered a better place in which to settle. But each proves to be a corruption of the lost competitive ideal. The torch goes out when taken to games that pervert its former significance. The children must learn what quenches and what revives the Olympic flame.

Eventually the children begin to realise that the torch responds to an action spontaneously performed for its own sake, but which does not knowingly harm anyone else. It 'doesn't like reasons' (p.166) and so is extinguished by games which use competition for an ulterior motive. In one desert-festival, for example, the race is used to choose which of its young are the most fit to survive and share the scarce resources. The losers are left in the desert to die. Another uses the race ostensibly to pick sacrificial victims, although the winning athlete secretly receives a drug to ensure his victory, for the State wants to be rid of him. The last games are soiled by betting, which leads men to cheat and ill-treat the athletes for material gain. In some way all the games ritualise and pervert the competition found in nature's race for survival. The 'civilised' world is repeatedly and ironically portrayed in terms of ritualised aggression. These states emanate from a bleak view of human nature. They express Walsh's 'real' fears that evolution is a slow mechanism which resists dramatic change, and which has nothing to do with the moral sphere. The facts of evolution, as interpreted here, particularly

²⁴ (London: Kestrel 1987. rpt. London: Puffin, 1989)

the necessity to physically compete as individuals, have an admonitory function, and have entirely negative associations.

Conversely the children are used to represent Walsh's hope that evolution is designed to produce an improved organism. This improvement is solely seen in moral terms, so as to carry the didactic point. At the end of the novel the children decide to abandon their search for fair adult games in order to create their own ideal community. The children's new home is the antithesis of the violent, invasive principles of all the adult communities they encountered, and there the torch is saved.²⁵

Because Walsh has packaged competition and physical success with undesirable moral positions, she chooses to show positive moral action as its antithesis. This means that the exercise of moral choice must exclude the terms of evolutionary success as she sees them. The children's symbolic rejection of the old ways thus relies upon the facts of evolution as she portrays them not operating in their community. Paradoxically this makes the children's evolutionary rise seem unlikely, because it makes them deliberately take actions which diminish their chances of physical survival, particularly as the key narrative strategy is to pit them against adult society at large.

Significantly the children's severance from the old ways is symbolised by the gesture of physical self-mutilation. The superbly gifted athlete, Philip, is forced to choose to cut his own hamstrings rather than be part of the corrupt Games. As a result the desirable evolutionary line becomes biologically inferior, and so less likely to physically survive. This endorses Walsh's fear that evolution is a largely stable, conservative process reliant solely upon the ability to compete for survival. It counteracts her hope that it is designed to produce a changed, better type of organism. This is likely to prompt the reader to predict that the strongest, undesirable communities are likely to dominate the future of this scenario. Hopeful change is only a slim and vulnerable possibility.

²⁵Landsberg (1988) responds to the positive elements of the book, saying it concerns 'cultural meanings...ideas, the central importance of memory' p.281.

Barry Faville encounters a similar tactical dilemma in The Keeper.²⁶ He depicts a post-disaster neo-primitivism when people live isolated lives in small villages. They live in fear of Loners: people who have been cast out from the villages because they have been born with minor physical abnormalities. Unbeknown to the hero, Michael, village superstition led to the brutal murder of his parents. The ruthless cruelty of the villagers is paralleled by the predatory strength of a local tiger which haunts the village. Throughout the novel Faville packages physical violence and competition with undesirable moral positions.

A small group of children gradually begins to question their repressive community. Faville suggests that they are different, able to overcome their lust for aggression. They accidentally discover that the Loners are not actually a threat, but are frightened and confused by being rejected and left to die in the wilds. At the end of the novel the children choose to reject the competitive ethics of their home village. Faville is keen to portray this as an attractive moral gesture:

We are not running away. We are shifting from a place we have outlived to somewhere else (p.157)

His resolution (articulating an alternative improved community) implies that the children have changed for the better. They too set off to try to create their own ideal home in an uncertain and competitive world. We never discover their true fate.

This severance is prompted by the selfless action of John, Michael's grandfather. John, a Loner, chooses not to reveal his family identity to Michael, because it would mean disclosing the secret of the murder. John realises that such knowledge would provoke either 'an act of blind rage' or 'an onset of delayed grief that would twist and torture' Michael. Michael's reactions would be negatively self-wounding: akin to the bitter violence which characterises the villagers he must reject. It would prevent him from desirable moral action.

What John is saving Michael from, however, is himself. Michael is thus seen to be dangerously subject to the damaging and violent behaviour of the villagers. This is

²⁶(Auckland, N.Z.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986)

portrayed as an inescapable fact of human nature: a biological problem of kind. It means that the children are *not* fundamentally changed at all, but simply evade the recognition of their own worst natures. Faville predicts they would be incapable of choosing to reject this, which counteracts his didactic aim. His prediction is rooted in pessimistic fear: that biological fact is likely to override Man's capacity for moral action. Again the exercise of moral choice can only be made by evading the facts of evolution. It is thus unlikely to occur, and pessimism dominates the narrative. The implied happy ending seems like an evasion of the truth.

In the last five years some children's authors have dramatically intensified the violence and horror in their visions of post-disaster primitivism. The Sword and the Dream²⁷ Trilogy by Janice Elliot, depicts an overwhelmingly bleak picture of a future England which is torn by fearful, bloody battles between factions which are gruesome perversions of current groups. Christians have become Crucifiers who torture and execute non-believers; scientists heartlessly and needlessly perform vivisection on humans and strive to recreate the 'purity' of 'Science's greatest triumph', the atomic bomb; the working masses have become Scum, ruled in Rat's Alley by Shanky, 'king of the midden'; soldiers are led by the ruthless Haldred the Hunter, who resembles Lucifer himself. Greatheart the Butcher roams 'the Wastes' in search of human flesh to eat and the Deadmen inhabit the barren Deadlands.

To them it is the greatest joy to die in battle... They fight anyone fool enough to wander into the Deadlands, or mostly do battle with each other. (p.124)

Needless death and despair are ubiquitous following The Catastrophe, and the land is scorched and hostile. Some search for a powerful throne in an elusive City, but find "War without end! From here to Jerusalem, they say." (p.124) Life is presented as a desperate battle.

Only the child hero, Red, is capable of representing moral hope. He is pitted against the rest of society. He summons Arthur, who wakes at Britain's hour of need and rekindles a vision 'of Britain whole again, at peace. ..living without fear. The wandering ended, the arms put

²⁷The King Awakes (London: Walker, 1987); The Empty Throne (London: Walker, 1987).

away and the sword rusting in the dew.' (p.156) But Arthur is 'no god or preacher. Just a soldier.' (p.154) The reader is disabused of belief in his supposed powers. He cannot act as a redeemer, telling Red "this world is yours, not mine...It will be what you make it." (p.172) At the time of writing the final part of the trilogy is yet unpublished, but there is little to suggest hope that Red will be able to do more than hold on to Arthur's vision, for he is overwhelmingly outnumbered by 'those who have pleasure in blood.' (p.172).

Laurence James' Dark Future²⁸ series is similarly peopled by savage tribes who practise atrocities such as cannibalism. James emphasises the harrowing brutality and despair of 'the blackened land of nightmares' contained in his near-future vision. He predicts that life seventy years after a nuclear catastrophe will resemble hell. He clearly intends his narratives to be read as a warning. The frontispiece of one novel reads:

Unless scientists look more to the future, the day will come when the sun won't rise.

James portrays his child-protagonists as basically well-meaning, sensible youths who act bravely in a set of extremely limited circumstances. Some of their gestures, like their deliberate destruction of a modern military arms cache in Beyond the Grave, elevate them above their fellow adults, and symbolise the hope that children can make the moral decisions that adults refuse to take. The book is entirely dominated, however, by the need to physically survive, which subordinates the children's role as a vehicle of moral improvement. In this context, survival depends upon the ability to kill, and the children's refusal to use the power of military technology leaves them a pessimistically vulnerable target in the race for survival. They never search for a better life and their bloody battle to survive is then portrayed in terms of a thrilling adventure, which is curiously at odds with the writer's declared didactic purpose.

Only one writer successfully avoids the tension between evolutionary necessity and the exercise of moral choice. Her artistic success is achieved by producing a morally ambiguous text. Elisabeth Mace's hauntingly bleak narrative The Travelling Man²⁹ relentlessly depicts

²⁸The Revengers (London: Bantam, 1992) Beyond the Grave (London: Bantam, 1992)

²⁹(London: Andre Deutsch, 1976)

the absolute amorality of the natural world to which humanity is adapted. Life is nothing but a competitive struggle for survival. Her characters all discover that whatever their aspirations and beliefs, they have only a lost cause to lose.³⁰ Her nihilistic narrative concentrates exclusively upon the gradual disillusionment of the protagonist, Will. Like Joseph, Will puts his faith in a misguided ideal, similarly attempting to recreate a lost past, a reascent from primitivism to scientific civilisation. He believes fervently that his search for a better life will reveal a city of 'clever men', who are secretly working 'to find their way back to the stars'. Will's quest is 'like a thread... back and forward into the dark: the place at the end of the world where all would be put right and glory would come again. Hold on to it, he urged, hold on to it.' (p.99)

Eventually, however, he must let go of both his ideal and his own life, because individual human nature itself renders hope impossible. A comparison of The Travelling Man with the earlier linked futuristic book, Ransome Revisited³¹ reveals Mace's need to abandon the promise of happiness within her work in order to achieve internal consistency. The Travelling Man creates profound levels of imaginative cohesion and a remarkable intensity of expression because of its unwillingness to compromise the internal and relentless narrative logic created by this view of evolution. The fiction is characterised by unusually high levels of pessimism and irony for a young readership, and is unusual in its authorial reticence to guide the reader towards the interpretation of moral meaning, which remains implied, rather than stated.³² In this way it suggests a young adult audience, and is perhaps not 'for' children in any meaningful way.

In both books a 'Terrible Disaster' has reduced peoples' lives to a primitivism based upon autonomous local control. The harshness of this future is described in the first book, which was later retitled Out There. It portrays a 'group of children struggling towards adulthood and an early world of work. This novel does not entirely escape falling into cliché. The children are depersonalised by being named as numbers and they toil in a slate-mine, quarrying for no apparent purpose. They are governed by a sadistic Overlooker,

³⁰Botten et al. (1983) note the book is particularly 'gloomy and pessimistic' p.234.

³¹(London : Andre Deutsch, 1974)

³²Esmonde (1977) observes 'what the author intends by her story is hard to say for certain', but it is 'an existential nightmare...filled with pointless cruelty'. p.218.

Leatherjack. Here number Eleven, 'Leven', comes to know Susanna, an unkempt rebel who has found a copy of Ransome's classic children's work Swallowdale and become entranced by the resourcefulness shown by those children of long ago. But times have changed, and Ransome's version of childhood has little meaning in the new environment. Leven also meets Will, a youth exemplifying 'corruption and truth walking in one body.' Will, the future anti-hero of The Travelling Man, is perfectly adapted to the new environment. He booby-traps the mine, killing innocents and Leatherjack alike, but freeing several children to run away 'to find a place and a meaning for life' Out There. Will sets out separately, and all head north towards a vague location called the Colony, where it is rumoured people treat each other humanely.

Out There the children discover that relationships are still governed by greed, suspicion and sadism - but the thread of hope of something better, symbolised by Swallowdale and its lost vision of childhood - is slimly sustained. Some are killed, but Susanna stops at the first refuge she finds, whilst at the end of the book Leven and AB reach the Colony, where Leven decides to become a keeper of 'Swallowdale sheep waiting like white stars for his hands, on the green universe, the mountain.' Leven's settlement suggests that a pastoral utopia is perhaps possible, but this annexed hopeful ending is jarringly inconsistent with the powerfully bleak context created throughout the novel.³³ The ending appears a failure of nerve on the writer's part, a reluctance to pursue the narrative's logic to its natural conclusion.

There is no such failure in the sequel and the result is an imaginative tour de force. It concentrates on Will's journey north. Will appears to exemplify youth striving to free itself from the limiting confines of existing modes of human experience. But he finds that he is utterly unable to transcend the prison of his own human self. He is not, as he believes, pitted against society, but is trapped biologically in a state of competitive individualism, which in turn reflects the conditions of the natural environment. His search for perfection Out There can ironically only reveal his imperfect inner reality.

³³A review in Growing Point 14, No.2 (1975) notes 'Yet how far has the author really contrived or intended a "happy ending"? Will's future vision is the only one-it may well cause the same world destruction in the future. Even if the children do find a home, a name, love, can they ever be young again?' p.2,658 Wehemeyer (1981) notes that the ending articulates an 'alternative to the dystopia: pastoral utopia' p.123.

Will is always an unpleasant, discontented character. He is a murderer, unflinchingly killing those who impede him. He bitterly scorns all the people that he meets, believing that he is different. For instance, he derides one 'cruel, careless people' who live by means of raiding parties and make human sacrifices to loch-creatures. Will believes

This is a stupid way to live, tied fast in something long past. I am only part way on a journey to where men live for a glorious future. I must get there. All this chanting and waiting around for death. (p.45)

Will uses Cat's death as a diversion to escape and travel on, scorning the boy's willingness to be a pointless sacrificial victim:

Die Catty and do it well. Think on that while you go. (p.54)

But Will is mistaken. The predatory loch-creatures *do* exist. The natural world's rules are the only rules governing human behaviour, and they are ruthless and brutal. He is unable to learn from other humans who appreciate this fact, for each is trapped in the prison of the individual self, and communication is impossible.

Will must learn, then, about human nature, which means there can be no city of clever men. As he moves further north he looks for the city, but finds 'just sea and wild country'. Another character, Ewen, tells Will he should look to the sea: "'You're filled up with someone's mad stories about glory, and you've never looked out there'". The sea he describes is 'a vast, wild nothing' and reflects the ironic truth of Will's quest. It symbolises death, and Will's suicide closes the novel. His self-sacrifice benefits no one.

Will learns that he too is tied in something long past, so that all he can do is die, and do it well. He finds the city, only to discover Dieter's people, who jealously guard rusting machines and their decaying privilege. At last Will recognises the truth of Dieter's reflections:

He wondered about Will, who imagined strange secrets and believed in a new and wonderful world - how could it be true, considering the so ordinary people he had known all his life. He thought, the world is nothing to me; it's better we keep what we have to ourselves. (p.121)

Dieter's selfishness results from a biological kind dictated by 'the outside world' which 'was so cruel'. Like Cormier, Mace employs the ultimate failure of the protagonist's quest to negate any optimistic expectations the reader may hold. In this way she uncompromisingly highlights the logical consequences of human arrogance. Mace's pessimistic vision portrays a future in which evolution has singularly failed to produce an improved human species. She systematically portrays the flaws in the evolutionary mechanism, facing the scientific fact that there may be no solace in the natural world. Will's mistake was to act on the assumption that the world had been designed for him and that he was a higher type of organism. Ironically, this arrogance actually prohibits him from moving forwards. Mace thus warns that a humanity governed by greed and selfishness will destroy itself, and, like the classic dystopian writers I will consider in the following chapter, she uses ironic closure to underline the point. Mace reposes considerable trust in the young reader's interpretative ability. Considering the dispiriting, relentless, measured tone of the writing, with no trace of anger, it is small wonder that her work has not been well-received on behalf of a young audience.

CHAPTER 3

CONDITIONED WORLDS AND THE EXTINCTION OF THE HERO: THE EFFECTS OF COMPROMISING THE PREMISES OF NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR AND BRAVE NEW WORLD

In Chapter 2 I signalled a body of neo-primitive futuristic fiction for children which resembles The Chrysalids' imaginative scenario. I observed, however, that the earliest children's writers to adopt Wyndham's story tended to adapt his basic premises, preferring to emphasise the probable social and political outcomes of the post-disaster scenario, rather than the possible, biological evolutionary outcomes. I noted an increasing tendency for children's writers to present credible, essentially predictable scenarios, and I suggested that this extrapolatory narrative strategy was linked to the didactic function of the children's book. I indicated that children's writers seemed keen to imply that political and social artefacts may be deliberately changed by an effort of moral will, in a way that biological development can not. Furthermore, I noted that biological development is habitually predicted to favour physical competition in an amoral world, which supposes that moral progress and biological development are likely to diverge.

In this chapter I intend to draw attention to the prolific numbers of teenagers' texts which predominantly employ the key narrative tactics of the classic 'adult' dystopias of Huxley and Orwell by drawing heavily on the nightmare artificiality of their urban hells. Many initially depict societies in which human artefacts have escalated, not diminished, but unlike Wyndham's vision, these are stigmatised. The dream of the celestial city is replaced by its nightmare ironic inversion. Speculation and the politics of advocacy give way to extrapolation and the politics of attack.

Many reviewers have also noticed the conspicuous resemblance of children's texts to Nineteen Eighty-Four and Brave New World.¹ Children's books often present a curious amalgam of both visions, blending what Cuddon describes as the 'unrelievedly depressing vision of Orwell' and Huxley's more witty and urbane anti-utopia.² This prompts me to consider the narrative similarities between the two works, rather than their differences.

¹See Hugh Crago Children's Book Review Index 1 No 2. (1971); review in Junior Bookshelf 49, No.1, (1985) p.45; Wehemeyer (1981) p.79. calls The Guardians a classic dystopia; review in Growing Point 17 No.4, (1978) p.3,412; Gough (1984)p.94.; Hollindale (1994) p.153.

²Cuddon (1977) p.719.

Both novelists shared key concerns about the future and used their fiction to attempt to instigate a change in the direction they perceived humanity was taking. Both sought to question what they viewed as a complacent attitude toward the idea of 'progress,' which they viewed as a dangerous ideological principle. They were deeply suspicious of the notion that human beings could be perfectible, either through a Christian change of heart or as a result of material 'progress'³. As Steinhoff observes, Orwell in particular felt that Wells had 'altered the landscape of the contemporary mind'⁴ by identifying scientists and mechanical development inextricably with advancement, by linking science with common sense, and by confusing the products of science with justice, liberty and common decency. Orwell and Huxley were more inclined to believe the opposite: that science was as likely to destroy and to be used for evil.

In short, both were heavily sceptical and used their fiction to turn the landscape of the contemporary mind in a different direction. They wanted to promote an inquiring and critical habit of mind, replacing complacent optimism and certainty with anxiety and fear. They were committed to raising disquieting questions, and the dystopian form, stridently stressing the politics of attack, seemed the best narrative vehicle to express their concerns. At a surface level their fictions emphasise social and political questions.

Each writer created a hugely negative portrayal of the future to throw light upon the present day. As Wain notes, it is

a well-understood convention that...*Brave New World* is a criticism of Western society in 1932, as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is of the same society in the closing moments of the Second World War.⁵

Both novelists relied upon irony to mount what Steinhoff has called 'an assault' on machine civilisation.⁶ Most critics respond to the attacks implied by these fictions: Kuehn describes Orwell's work as 'a destructive work by an essentially destructive writer.'⁷ Others, such as

³ See W. Steinhoff *The Road to 1984* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1975) p.216.

⁴ *ibid.* p.10

⁵ John Wain in R. Kuehn ed. *Aldous Huxley: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974) p.28.

⁶ *op.cit.* p.13

⁷ *op.cit.* p.4

Voorhees, have observed that these attacks stem from a disposition to raise searching questions. He points out that Orwell is not obliged to provide answers to the questions at the heart of his narrative, although 'the revulsion it inspires implies at least negative solutions.'⁸

Indeed, it is crucial to the dystopia's admonitory purpose that any 'answers' necessarily *only* exist outside the text, because they are committed to a heavily ironic form which must, at all costs, convince the reader of the need to strive for political and social improvement upon more sane principles. Both writers reposed trust in the reader to respond to irony and to infer that 'we can do something about it, now. For us, it is not too late.'⁹ As Parrinder points out

...in truly didactic fictions even a surface reading is incomplete unless at some point/ we have become aware of the 'lesson' as separate from the narrative.¹⁰

This has, of course, had the result that they have been notoriously misinterpreted. Steinhoff reports that Orwell claimed he designed his fable 'to prod the Western mind into a more conscious and militant resistance to the totalitarian virus to which it is now exposed' (p199). But instead of responding with an active commitment to resistance, Hollis succumbs to what he sees as an 'underlying boundless despair'¹¹ by seeing it as prophecy, not a warning. Furthermore, Calder observes that many respond too literally to the surface ideology carried by the overtly 'political message,' by interpreting that Orwell had a party-political case to make. She continues

...many readers read the book as a statement of Orwell's rejection of socialism...the fact that it could be read in that way....poses a problem..... Deutscher...attacked Orwell for writing a book that was politically dangerous.¹²

This problem of 'misreading', despite the author's attempts to secure a stock response, is a vital consideration for the novelist for young readers. The 'unalloyed pessimism' ¹³ of these

⁸Steinhoff p.199

⁹Scholes (1975) p.74

¹⁰Parrinder (1980) pp.68/69

¹¹Steinhoff, p.199

¹²Jenni Calder Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976) p.45

¹³Griffiths (1980)p.105

classic visions is necessary to relentlessly depict the dangers of a complacent attitude. Both writers are fully committed to depicting the 'real' consequences of misguided beliefs and untested assumptions by, as Orwell put it, drawing 'ideas out to their logical consequences.'¹⁴ Every ideal must turn into its opposite in order to fully express the urgency of the warning.

Both authors voice their grave misgivings by predicting final solutions, ironically 'perfect' states which must seem unequivocally undesirable to 'prove' that the social and political choices that have been made in the novel are irrevocable and utterly exclude traditionally cherished values. Once this path has been taken, they suggest, there can be no hope. Each novelist pits the individual against society as their key narrative tactic, to emphasise in human terms just what is being lost. The shocking failure of the potentially 'heroic' individuals (Winston, John, and to some degree, Bernard) serves ultimately to underline this point. Given such future circumstances characters can only logically be presented as victims who are hopelessly trapped in their grave situations. They literally possess no means to envisage an alternative, and their 'heroic' struggles are ironically bound to fail. The novelists depict their ultimate destruction to highlight the consequences of the metaphorical extinction of their moral beliefs. The ironic closure of their defeat feels to the reader like the only feasible outcome. Failure is utterly consistent with the predictive hypothesis postulated by the preceding narrative, and is entirely compatible with the admonitory didactic purpose.

As Scholes points out, the tactical decision to portray the protagonist in diametrical opposition to society focuses the reader's attention on predominantly social questions. Furthermore, he argues, the means by which dystopian fictions carry their didacticism is subtle and places substantial demands upon the reader's power to derive unstated moral meanings as a logical consequence of his imaginative engagement:

This form is marked by its emphasis on social questions...They are projections of realism and naturalism into future time. Thus..these fictions of the near future draw their power from the cognitive systems of present social science. They are in some sense predictive/ rather than merely speculative, and they predict on the basis of current knowledge in the fields of political science, economics, psychology, sociology, and the other human sciences. Such fictions often attain great emotional power in a very

¹⁴Steinhoff, p.3

interesting way. They present a noticeable discontinuity with our current situation - but they insist that this altered situation is not actually discontinuous, that it is in fact a reasonable projection of existing trends. These fictions of the near future thus deny that they are discontinuous, while nevertheless shocking us by their difference from the world that - whether we claim to like it or not - we are presently functioning in reasonably well or we would be in no position to be reading this literature at all. (p.71/72)

It is abundantly clear from the outset of Nineteen Eighty-Four that science is applied to control man, rather than man controlling science. The initial pages depict a deeply dispiriting urban environment. Winston's world is squalid, drab and monotonous. In this context people are merely numbers. Dressed in regulation overalls they cease to be individuals and merely drift, like the rubbish which pollutes the streets. Their physical sickness represents their spiritual malaise. In Airstrip One institutions, not people, menacingly dominate the landscape. The full ironic implications of this 'progress' are carried by Orwell's early depiction of the Ministries. Politics are no longer used to sustain and support human life, but to divide and rule by fuelling human aggression, ensuring a climate of fear and betrayal which destroys traditionally cherished corporate values. The Ministry of Love thus becomes 'the really terrifying one': ironically fostering the opposite, hate.

'The flavour and tendency of the book has become common knowledge,'¹⁵ and I will only briefly outline Orwell's strategies. The first part of the novel documents the logical means by which the Party turns men into mechanical products of the system by demanding their utter conformity. The orgiastic sessions of hate, the Anti-sex league, the systematic removal of the family, the propaganda machine which obliterates memory and rewrites history, the removal of privacy are all details which ensure this future seems plausible and extrapolatory.

Orwell overtly focuses upon the artificial mechanisms used to bring such a mass-conditioned State into existence: the telescreens, the posters of Big Brother, newspeak, and the relentless political slogans which saturate Winston's world. As Griffiths observes, 'the technical devices are only the instruments for enabling the author to make social and political criticisms.'¹⁶ The terrifyingly brutal imagery, epitomised by O'Brien's exhortation to

¹⁵Calder (1976) p.45

¹⁶Griffiths (1980)p.77

'Imagine a jackboot stamping on a human face, forever,' carry the full ironic impact of a society in which institutional aggression is the only creed.

Orwell needs a would-be rebel, whose spirit is broken by this perverted system, to make the ideological impact of his warning unequivocally felt in human terms. Winston is used to 'prove' the case: to warn that this could happen. It is most significant for my purposes that the full horror of this possible future lies in the imagined reshaping of the human species. The implications of the narrative run at far deeper imaginative levels than the level of party politics.¹⁷ The questions raised strike at the moral heart of the system of ideas underpinning the social and political organisation of Winston's world. An examination of evolutionary metaphor running within the text reveals the consistency of all the narrative features of Orwell's dystopia. The text displays a wholeness of imaginative engagement which not only testifies to Orwell's ideological conviction (no telling fractures appear to undermine the felt truth of the surface ideology) but also reveals the profound levels of imaginative coherence that demonstrate that Orwell has overcome the artistic difficulties of the form.

Orwell's didactic purpose relies on conveying the fact that Winston can never escape nor 'win.' His narrative creates an inexorably predictable, heavily ironic narrative logic in which his defeat is inevitable from the start. Winston's hopes are repeatedly translated into their opposite: abject despair. This is what 'Doublethink' means. This wholehearted commitment to ironic inversion is crucial to Orwell's admonitory purpose.

The imaginative language of evolution is used to prove the full consequences of a conditioned society, by showing men who prize death above life. Orwell's thesis is that the 'system,' by seeking perfection and stability, ironically resists and opposes life itself. He imagines that the Party has chosen an evolutionary dead-end, systematically removing the variation needed for adaptation and change. By the end of the novel the worst thing that can happen to Winston is to be condemned to live.

¹⁷See Calder, *op.cit.* p.45

In Nineteen Eighty-Four the Party relies not simply upon outlawing the world of nature, but by biologically altering human nature itself. "We do not merely destroy our enemies,' claims O'Brien, 'we change them.' (p.128) Winston must be 'reshaped' to conform to the Party's truth and sense of artificial perfection.

The individual is significantly perceived by O'Brien in biological terms, as 'only a cell. The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism.' (p.227) For O'Brien the individual can only exist as a minute part of the collective whole- alone it is not simply powerless, but utterly meaningless. For the organism to function, the part which does not conform must be changed: this is a matter of altering Winston's existence, not simply his behaviour. For this reason O'Brien insists:

we make/ the brain perfect before we blow it out...The command of the old despotisms was "Thou shalt". Our command is "Thou art." (pp.219/ 220)

Winston's experience shows that mere political loyalty is insufficient: 'human nature,' as personified by the ordinary man in the street, must be re-created to achieve this model of ironic perfection. This means removing, not simply outlawing, those aspects which make for recognisable human beings.

Thus Winston is forced to relinquish his sense of the biological identity to which he clings

I think I exist..I am conscious of my own identity. I was born and I shall die. I have arms... (p.223)

This inherently private worldview seems unassailable, representing the hope that the Party may be defeated, or that, at least, there are aspects of the human spirit which are indomitable, and upon which traditional heroism has relied. Winston argues that the Party cannot control everything: it cannot logically dictate 'gravity or disease, pain, death...' Even killing him cannot destroy his spirit and his belief in these unalterable laws of nature.

But O'Brien proves that the world of nature ironically represents a false hope for Winston

You must get rid of those nineteenth-century ideas about the laws of Nature. We make the laws of Nature...Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes: only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. (p.228)

O'Brien tells the still defiant and hopeful Winston the shattering truth:

You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature.(p.229)

O'Brien re-conceptualises human nature, changing it 'for the worse'.¹⁸ With bitter irony Orwell plays out the consequences of this assumption. Winston is finally forced to betray Julia, begging that she be tortured in his place. His actions finally prove beyond doubt that he is a product of the system as O'Brien insists. O'Brien can rely upon the fact that Winston is powerless to resist, once faced with a stark choice between self-preservation and his loyalty for another individual. Winston can be predicted not to withstand torture, not because he is weak, but because he has already been created by the State as a brute, incapable of love, altruism, friendship and personal loyalty.¹⁹ By fuelling his innate aggression and hate from the outset, the Party has successfully conditioned his nature so that Winston is powerless. Orwell consistently proves that Winston's apparent gestures of rebelliousness, particularly his 'love' for Julia, are actually merely illusory. Any optimistic expectations the reader may be anticipated to hold are dashed repeatedly.

For example, at the very point in the novel at which Winston believes that his sexual union with Julia successfully represents a rebellious act of defiance and freedom, his language ironically proves that he is actually still imprisoned:

Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act.'(p.119)

Winston can only see in terms of conflict and power-politics and is thus rendered pitifully incapable of thinking radically in terms of love or loyalty. The Party has succeeded in polluting the sexual act in Winston's mind, inexorably trapping him within his conditioned

¹⁸Calder (1976) p.40

¹⁹Calder (1976) notes that 'Winston has no stature...otherwise his defeat could be seen as heroic, and that would have been contrary to the book's purpose. We must be shown a man, aware of his vulnerability and weakness, brought even lower than he was before.' p.40

self. He simply does not, nor cannot, possess the moral qualities by which the human spirit can defeat the inhumanity of the tyrant. Nineteen Eighty-Four portrays, then, the extinction of humanity. Hope no longer exists, for, as O'Brien makes clear:

If you are a man, Winston, then you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors. (p.228)

Huxley, like Orwell, was intensely aware that people are easily influenced, and concerned that human society and human nature would probably develop in ways which were not for the better, but for the worse. He similarly presented an ironic narrative, in which human ideals lead inexorably not to Paradise, but to Hell. He too pursued the theme of the manipulation of the masses, manifest in a rigid class hierarchy, overseen by a World Controller. Here, too, there is no room for individualism, privacy nor non-conformity and people have become mechanical components of a system founded upon impersonal economic forces.²⁰

Huxley's new world is not brutally aggressive nor overtly menacing, because science has been used to make society 'progress' so far towards an ideal state that demonstrations of political power have become redundant. Tragedy, suffering and anxiety have all been eliminated

The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant...

Huxley relies upon accumulating details of the glib superficiality of this existence to signal the novel's portrayal of systematic institutional violence, which is dangerously disguised by the attractive hedonistic luxuries of material abundance. The apparent 'perfection'²¹ of the new world's paradise is illusory. Irony is used to carry the didactic point that these people are no longer fully human, but have committed themselves to a death-in-life existence. Early in the novel the atmosphere is cold and impersonal, the hatcheries suggest crematoriums rather than birthplaces. Here, too, the distinctions between men and mechanical artefacts are

²⁰See Miller and Smith (1989) p.322

²¹William Matter 'On *Brave New World*' in ed. Rabkin No Place Else (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974) p. 94

repeatedly blurred. The Controller's colourless language conveys the monotonous, mechanical lifelessness of the new world's atmosphere: 'Men as steady as wheels upon their axles, sane men, obedient men, stable in contentment.'

Here too, the state's 'success' relies upon altering individual human nature. 'Progress' means that human eggs can be made to bud by arresting their development over and over again, until the Director can boast that one egg can produce

anything from eight to ninety-six embryos - a prodigious improvement, you will agree, on nature. (p.18)

Huxley's didactic purpose relies upon the reader perceiving the irony of this statement, and he plays out the logical consequences of the hypothesis that Man can create his own artificial world. The state has removed the need for sexual reproduction, and hence family loyalties and intense feelings have been denied, replaced by the superficial pleasures of a drug-induced happiness and a conditioned allegiance to the Community. Humans are 'decanted' as 'socialised beings', unable to challenge the society for which they were created. The synthetic system is calculated to inspire revulsion in the reader, particularly in an early scene in which babies are subjected to electric shocks to induce them to form an aversion to flowers and books.

Huxley's techniques are usually much more subtle, however. It is significant, for example, that the Director celebrates the fact that he can better nature by producing 'Guaranteed sterile individuals'. The sterility of this system is a crucial factor in bringing home the full ideological impact of Huxley's fictional warning. Humanity has literally removed the possibility of its own regeneration, and destined itself to metaphorical extinction.

The irony of the situation is underlined by the fates of the two would-be rebels, Bernard, a manufactured individual, and John, the Savage from the Reservation. Bernard, despite a slight mistake in the decanting process which allowed him to have some vestige of human feeling, is still scarcely human. He is a mechanical product, biologically bound for failure in human terms from the test-tube: his conditioned self 'can never possess the language, ideas

nor intense feelings needed for revolt.'²² He cannot hope to change the system with which he is ill at ease, he cannot experience hatred, and is forced to remain 'hopelessly himself'. He longs to be 'embattled against the order of things' and to raise his oddity into heroism, but, as in Nineteen Eighty-Four, traditionally conceived heroism is a meaningless concept in the new world. His true enemy is his own manufactured nature - his absolute lack of humanity - which he is powerless to counter. He is simply removed and 'denied the tragic status he craves, not because he is a threat, but because he cannot fit comfortably into the order of the system.'²³

More fully human, John appears to have more opportunity to heroically confront the system, which he finds intolerable. But, like Winston, if he is a man, he is the last man. He is painfully alone in the new world, because Bernard's kind are unable to respond to his humanity. They fail to understand his violent gestures of defiance, and their incomprehension renders the gestures meaningless. Even his final act of protest - his suicide - fails to register in their minds, for human nature has been so radically altered that they are biologically incapable of responding with shock or sympathy. As a result John's tragic suffering means nothing, and his death is ironically inverted to signify defeat, madness and despair. Nothing else could be expected when the individual stands alone against the enormity of the system.

John's²⁴ failure is crucial to Huxley's didactic purpose, the ironic resolution finally underlining the dreadful consequences of a species bent upon destroying its own best nature and the variety needed to develop and change. Like Orwell's novel, the ultimate imaginative closure of the protagonist's desolation and death leave no room for ambiguity on the reader's part. Huxley and Orwell both rely on the reader to move from an understanding of the absolute and perverted 'ideals' presented in the dystopia to infer a clearer and more complex vision of good. The novelist anticipates that the reader will be shocked by the final closing off of hopeful possibility and, forced to consider the defeat of the nonconformist and the suicide of innocent and betrayed victims, will move beyond the close of the novel to a

²²Calder (1976) p.36

²³Calder (1976) p. 36

²⁴Keith May Aldous Huxley (London: Paul Elek, 1972) observes that John provides the human interest in the story, and is 'compelling'. p.101

new sense of personal responsibility. For the reader, unlike the characters, has a second chance, and possesses the freedom to protest and fight tyranny. The literature of warning uses the stark unhappy ending to make readers think seriously after they have finished reading. As Iskander observes of Cormier's work, the climactic structure of pessimistic novels

...with their shocking, unhappy, but quite realistic endings reinforces not the temporary defeats or a bleak pessimism, but rather a longing for justice. (These) books "argue" for moral responsibility far more effectively than sermonising or stereotypical formulas of virtue automatically triumphant.²⁵

This message is, however, necessarily implicit in the classic dystopia, for such hope can logically not exist in the world of the book.

Like the classic 'adult' dystopias, the centrepiece of many of the children's futuristic novels that I have examined is political or technological. Frequently the main narrative interest is fuelled by the contrast between a small group of non-conformist children who are contrasted with a repressive, intolerant and hyper-conformist body politic.²⁶ These basic conflicts emerge whether the future scenario is imagined in neo-primitive or ultra-technological terms. The general emphasis of this chapter, however, is upon books which stress the dramatic escalation of technology by depicting urban hells which make conditioned life intolerable, whether by overt fear and force like Nineteen Eighty-Four or by making its citizens depressingly happy as in Brave New World.

Like these classic pre-texts, the children's dystopia typically focuses upon the would-be rebel to make the inhuman implications of the social and political milieu felt. Few children's novelists, however, remain faithful to the ironic dystopian form. Instead of depicting the downfall of the rebel, they habitually try to allow the rebel at least some measure of success. The maverick child protagonist is often seen ultimately to overthrow and reform the system, or to escape the system and begin life again elsewhere, articulating a radical alternative to the conditioned dystopia. If the rebel's insurrection fails politically, he is rarely made to relinquish the sense of his own identity which Winston and Bernard are denied. I would

²⁵Iskander (1987) p.18

²⁶See Hollindale (1990) p.16

trace these compromises to a perceived need to protect or overtly guide young readers, but the consequences to the dystopian story produced are frequently damaging, resulting in ideological confusion (with a fracture between what the author hopes and what he truly fears) and artistic incoherence. I will present the spectrum of narrative strategies writers employ and use an exploration of the evolutionary metaphor to highlight how, at deep imaginative levels, writers contradict themselves within their narratives and thereby risk contradicting the didactic objective of the dystopian novel.

Once more, in my opinion, the work of John Christopher cast the mould for later children's works of this genre. The Tripods²⁷ Trilogy shows his disposition to raise the serious and daunting political questions of the dystopian tradition, but also bears the formulaic clichés of an early science fiction adventure story. The Cragos' charges²⁸ against the work are justifiable, but I think they stem from a tactical dilemma which is, for me, of crucial significance. I will devote some time to a detailed consideration of the Trilogy, because I believe it epitomises the tactical dilemmas facing children's writers who choose to adopt the dystopian form.

In all his work, Christopher is preoccupied more importantly with ideas and moral questions than individual people. Thus, like Huxley, these are explored and played out somewhat at the expense of psychological characterisation and rich detail.²⁹ It is interesting, however, that the Tripods trilogy becomes less convincing and more schematic and cliché-ridden as it progresses. For example, the notion that green three-legged aliens threaten Earth is importantly not raised until the second book, when the idea of happy human servitude has been firmly established. Wehemeyer reports that Christopher claimed he did not know how the Tripods would be overcome when he completed the first book.³⁰ It is significant, however, that he naturally felt they must be overcome, displaying a desire to restore a sense of security and offer a final reassurance.

²⁷The White Mountains (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1967); The City of Gold and Lead (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1967); The Pool of Fire (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1967)

²⁸H. & M. Crago (1971) object to Christopher's use of 'science fiction paraphernalia', and feel that the work is unoriginal, clichéd, 'predictable' and 'not very imaginative'. p.77

²⁹May (1972) feels the beginning of Huxley's novel is an 'exposition thinly disguised as story' p.101

³⁰See Wehemeyer (1981) p.83

In The White Mountains, then, Christopher creates a vision of the future which explores the ease with which the masses can be politically manipulated, even, as in the classic dystopias, willingly participating in their own debasement. He presents a future in which science and high technology are employed to dominate the majority. The 'Tripods' themselves appear to be robotic machines with artificial intelligence. Like Big Brother, they are all-seeing and menacingly able to monitor the movements of individuals. Like the Ministries they tower above landscape, ominously lurking in view of every settlement and capable of striding swiftly across land, they can easily outpace any human.

Their physical dominance is supreme, and the 'Masters' have no need to display violence against their puny subjects. It is gradually revealed that each year every village celebrates a festival known as the 'Capping' ceremony, during which every adolescent is willingly offered to the Tripods. They enter the machinery, only to return with a metal cap fastened painlessly onto their shaved heads. Gradually the hair grows back, and the cap becomes indiscernible, fused with the flesh. Like the classic dystopias, then, Christopher posits a form of political conditioning in which the Masters biologically manipulate the masses. Individual differences are removed, ensuring perfect, peaceful and contented communities. Once installed, the Cap is irremovable, and human nature itself has been altered, or rather, denied. Capping thus represents a form of mass-conditioning which men are powerless to resist.

Christopher has thus, like Huxley and Orwell, created a world in which change seems impossible, not merely because of the scale and technological might of the Tripods, but because of their biological manipulation of men.³¹ He then becomes committed to ensuring that the intended young reader perceives the evils of this denial of freedom, as well as the paradoxical benefits. At first this is presented ironically: the masses seem stupidly subservient and dull-witted. Eventually, however, the teenager, Will, evades Capping, so that he can discover that such extreme conformity is literally an ironic denial of life and one's humanity.

³¹Crago (1971) wonders 'if Christopher's worlds are a little too conditioned' p.77

In the first book of the trilogy, the Tripods are purely machines, suggesting a nightmare escalation of human artefacts which have grown to dominate their creators. A small band of rebels finally join together to plan to fight to free the majority. Christopher clearly separates the rebels, whose ideal is located in political resistance 'among men whose minds are their own.' (p.157) Against such powerful opponents as the Tripods, however, the resistance seems predictably futile.

In the later books Christopher portrays the unthinking masses' choice of self-extinction in more starkly literal terms. Plausibility diminishes³² as he reveals that the Tripods are merely modes of transport for huge aliens from space, who have established three gold-domed cities on Earth.³³ As in the classic dystopias, the gross artificiality of the city is seen to offer a death-in-life existence for humans, but Christopher uses even more shocking strategies to emphasise the irony of misguided human conformity. Capped humans enter Games, competing to win the glory and privilege of being taken to serve their Masters in their Cities. But, ironically, their dreams and hopes draw them to a painful and literal death. The cities are filled with an artificial gravity so strong that the Masters' human slaves cannot stand upright, and the environment slowly kills them. These conditions are essential to the aliens' survival and in time they intend to change Earth's atmosphere accordingly, ensuring the literal extinction of humanity in the process.

By escalating the fears for humanity towards the end of the trilogy, Christopher has shifted the emphasis of his terms of reference, making it clear that the final conflict is not purely between political factions and a metaphoric struggle for the qualities which make human life worthwhile, but is instead transformed into a battle for literal survival between two competing species, only one of which can survive. His decision to heighten the stakes may be due to a reluctance to repose trust in his young readership to perceive the suicidal impulse metaphorically implied by extreme political conformity.

But the strategy also deeply affects the moral significance of his story. Unlike the classic dystopias, Man is no longer seen to be struggling against his own worst nature, fighting his

³²See Wehemeyer, p.83 'not the most probable of stories'

³³Crago 'doubts the imaginative basis upon which it is built' as a result p.78

stultifying desires for stability, comfort or power. Both species are instead motivated by the amoral struggle for life itself. This is both liberating and restrictive. On the one hand it allows Christopher to portray a heroic battle, which the children win, against all the odds. The hero, Will, infiltrates and destroys the Masters' cities in fast-paced adventure, which allows the reassurance that the traditional hero may exercise choice and action over his world. He is transformed from helpless victim to heroic agent of change.

On the other hand, however, it tends to have a crudely simplifying effect upon the preceding ironic narrative logic, which predicts human failure, systematically translating hopes into fears, dreams into nightmares, the quest for life into a march towards death. It is therefore hugely implausible that the Masters should be overcome, and the plot-device in which Will fortuitously discovers the aliens' Achilles heel is disappointingly clichéd and improbable. What 'starts as a quest for freedom suddenly turns into a race for sheer survival.'³⁴ The heroic adventure narrative which is grafted on at the end shifts the pace of the story to a headlong 'fast-forward' resolution.³⁵ More importantly it works against the rich moral relativism that has been painstakingly created throughout, because the pace promotes a probable reading which views Will's overthrow of the Masters as a victory which has little to do with morality, but is instead simply a matter of biological necessity and literal survival.

Christopher strives to maintain a focus on the irony, by heavily coding the qualifications to Will's morally ambiguous 'victory', showing Will's remorse at having betrayed his kind 'Master' by murdering him. The tone of the resolution is sombre, as, newly freed, humans begin to fight amongst themselves. But evolutionary necessity and the facts of physical survival are likely to be used to evade the morality of these choices, and the sheer pace of the heroic adventure narrative is likely, in my opinion, to draw readers' attention away from perceiving that, in many ways, the aliens were a morally superior species.³⁶

Christopher closes the novel with the politics of advocacy, by depicting the teenage heroes agreeing to dedicate their lives to restoring world unity. The naive optimism with which

³⁴Wehemeyer (1981) p.83

³⁵ See Wolf (1985) p.48

³⁶See Growing Point 7 No.5 (Nov. 1968) p1203 'The Masters represent the possible extinction of Man, but are also a higher organism in a way'.

they view this task seems designed to be adopted by many readers, because after all, these heroes have already achieved the seemingly impossible. Humanity is finally conceived of achieving a new start, and Christopher's hero moves forward to maturity. The youngsters' moral choices will shape the narrative future, for better or worse, but that future remains open-ended, unwritten.

The decision to leave room for the survival of the hero risks undermining the didactic objective of the dystopia, which warns by predicting that, having followed this path, humanity is a lost cause. The sherdlike ending allows the reader to imagine various outcomes and attempts to reduce the scope for self-contradiction within the preceding text by accommodating the naive hope (associated with the heroic narrative) that human nature will radically change to become peace-loving, and the fear (located in the more prominent ironic dystopian narrative) that predictably new freedom will soon translate into aggression and self-destruction. I believe Christopher's preferred reader perceives that Will has won the battle with the Masters, but not the war with inherent human nature. We have seen that even his 'heroic' actions are not morally blameless..³⁷

It is significant that Christopher's next work envisaging a future of scientific over-control moves appreciably nearer to the models offered by Huxley and Orwell. The Guardians³⁸ envisages a future in which Man is dominated by a secret human elite of 'Guardians'. Christopher turns his back on the fantastic, depicting an all-too-plausible scenario in which contemporary lifestyles are readily identifiable, if exaggerated. In this way it is abundantly clear that the future is the result of human moral choices and human mistakes.

His approach - the use of intentionally convincing, extrapolatory warning, which is so realistic it could be taken as a prediction - is typical of the methods most children's writers subsequently used to convey the irony of a stable future society. Its didacticism is considerably nearer the surface of the narrative and relies upon the predictive ironic logic of the classic dystopian tradition, in much more noticeable ways than the earlier *Tripods*

³⁷ibid. This review sees the ending as a 'harsh coda', responding to the pessimistic prediction of the sherdlike ending

³⁸(Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1970 rpt. 1987)

trilogy. As a result there is a sense of tighter authorial control throughout, more clearly guiding the reader's thoughts and presenting rather wooden characters who act as mouthpieces for the main ideas. The whole novel, despite winning the Guardian Award, is, in my opinion, one of Christopher's more schematic, unsatisfying works, a poor imitation of the classic dystopias it brings to mind.

According to Townsend,³⁹ the socio-political framework of the novel is so obtrusive and simplistically conceived that it results in a spoilt story. This is, however, a formula which has attracted a vast number of children's writers. Many futuristic stories foreground a patently unjust and divisive future social system, to the point of cliché. Strict class divisions are enforced, for example, in Red Zone,⁴⁰ Futuretrack 5,⁴¹ The Vandal,⁴² Daz 4 Zoe,⁴³ King Creature Come,⁴⁴ The Tomorrow City,⁴⁵ Natfact 7,⁴⁶ The Others,⁴⁷ Wild Jack,⁴⁸ The Game,⁴⁹ Devil on My Back⁵⁰ and This Time of Darkness⁵¹. All of these books depict some version 'of a high-tech metropolis or bunker devoid of any positive life qualities.'⁵² Sometimes the State fuels people's aggression by deliberately engineering extreme social divisions which make the privileged few jealously and selfishly guard their possessions (Daz 4 Zoe, Red Zone, King Creature Come). In some novels appalling institutionalised social deprivation is used, as in 1984, to control the masses. (Red Zone, Futuretrack 5, King Creature Come, The Vandal, Daz 4 Zoe) In all of these named texts, people betray each other, clash in violent confrontation, or their anger erupts into vandalism and displays of destructive aggression.

Other texts may emphasise the fact that, although superficially people are not openly hostile, and accept the enforced social inequality, people nevertheless feel no affection for each

³⁹Townsend (1971)

⁴⁰Tom Browne (London:MacMillan Topliner, 1980)

⁴¹Robert Westall (Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1983 rpt. Puffin Plus, 1985)

⁴²Ann Schlee (London:MacMillan, 1979)

⁴³Robert Swindells (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990)

⁴⁴John Rowe Townsend (OUP, 1980)

⁴⁵Monica Hughes (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978)

⁴⁶John Tully (London:Methuen, 1984)

⁴⁷Alison Prince (London: Methuen, 1986)

⁴⁸John Christopher (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1971)

⁴⁹Enid Richemont (London: Walker, 1990)

⁵⁰Monica Hughes (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983)

⁵¹H.M. Hoover (New York: Viking, 1980)

⁵²Stephens (1992) p.128

other. They are, like Bernard's kind, merely cogs in a social machine. In The Vandal, for instance, a mother soon forgets her son once he accepts 'The Drink', which ensures oblivion and thus utter conformity to the common computer-held 'Memory.' Often the computer is used to represent a mindless conformity or 'silent violence'⁵³ which the people are powerless to resist. 'Infopaks' are inserted on the necks of the children in Devil on My Back, so that their minds are docile and dominated by technology. In many books a secret human elite exploits science to control others' existence (Devil on My Back, Futuretrack 5, The Vandal, A Rag, a Bone and a Hank of Hair⁵⁴) Computer technology consistently represents a technological determinism in which people are only seen as numbers. (Devil on My Back, The Awakening Water⁵⁵) In many books technology ensures that privacy is absolutely denied:

..the Scripta would turn sounds into written words for microfilm projection, so that the words could be read; or for coding and filing in The Memory Bank; or anything else.'
(Fisk p29)

Brainwashing is common, and drugs are often administered to pacify the population (The Game, The Vandal, Devil on my Back.)

The concrete bunkers of the numerous Dome cities or artificially-lit underground developments clearly signal that this is not living, but merely existing. Food is often tasteless and unrecognisable:

He pressed the buttons and let the server serve him. Frujuice, Blend, Fiz, Chocmalt...the beautiful, colourful, hygienic, disposable beakers nested in the clever, hygienic, colourful trays. 'And a Kolamint!' cooed the automatic voice from the automatic dispenser. (Fisk p97)

Frequently the inflexibility of the system is underlined by pitting the unyielding artificial concrete of the city against the fragile beauty of nature.⁵⁶ In The Vandal, The Tomorrow City and The Game wardens patrol the streets to make sure that the trees do not shed their leaves, soiling the concrete roads. The 'Naturekill' lorries imagined by Richemont are recreated in several other books.

⁵³ Growing Point 18, No.2 (1979) p.3547

⁵⁴ Nicholas Fisk (Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1980)

⁵⁵ G.R. Kesteven (London: Chatto, 1977)

⁵⁶ See Crew (1988) p.81

In short, the depiction of factitious dystopian worlds is often crudely drawn, characterised by heavy-handed and over-worn devices. The schematic and clichéd landscapes I am sketching here readily illustrate the prominence of the gadgetry to which many writers resort, presumably to ensure that any reader can see the undesirability of the futures depicted. It is interesting that, once established, most writers attempt to resolve these dystopias by depicting an improving situation.

In Christopher's The Guardians, for example, society is organised simplistically into strict class divisions. Most people live "in crowds and noise and squalor" in the Conurb (p.154). The 'processed foods and the blaring din' (p.175) signal the spiritual paucity of an existence in which the masses mindlessly swarm to watch violent Games or are content to watch 'holovision'. Both pastimes are designed to channel 'the aggression and violence..inherent in man's nature' (p.166) into harmless recreation, in which men are significantly encouraged not to participate in action, but simply to watch.

The ideological impact relies upon ensuring the reader recognises the horror of this critique. To this end Christopher heavy-handedly stigmatises the city. Massive institutions reduce everything into hugely impersonal, faceless bureaucracy. Employing the typically dystopian logic of ironic inversion, Christopher shows the institutions which should nurture and promote health - the school and the hospital - actually hurt and kill. Rob's father, for example, becomes a mere number on his admittance to hospital, and Rob is told of his father's death in brutally inhuman terms when he goes to visit him.

"In the morgue..He..died of heart failure..They'll give you particulars at the next office. Next please." (p.20)

This is clearly not living, but merely existing. Initially there is a feel of 1984 as City-life is controlled by police in 'copters'; there is constant surveillance via closed-circuit TV; orgiastic communal gatherings are encouraged and the education system is clearly used to subjugate the will of the individual to the corporate will.

Shocked by his father's inexplicable death and by the intolerable bullying encountered at school, the teenage protagonist, Rob, like Winston, attempts to escape the strictures of such a miserable existence. As in the classic dystopias strict social divisions are maintained. Rob crosses the Wire which divides the city from the rural County, surprised to find that 'the barrier was not strong in the physical sense, but in people's minds it's enormous' (p.118). He gradually discovers the secret elite governing the system are surprisingly ordinary men, however, motivated by benign intentions like the hidden government of Brave New World. Everyone is conditioned to be happy with their lot, and all is made to '*appear* natural because people cannot be contented unless they believe their lives to be natural.' (p.166)

Rob must learn that the appearance belies the ironic reality. The privileged few he meets in the County may appear free in their luxurious country mansions, with servants and traditional sports. But here too, Christopher soon asserts the ironic logic of the dystopia, for the freedom is illusory. The countryside is as closely monitored and controlled as the Conurb, and seems even more chilling for initially appearing to be a lost Paradise, when actually it is a death-in-life existence. Rob learns that the County represents sterility. It has no future, existing in a forgotten past : 'As far as we're concerned the clock stopped just before the sun went down on the British Empire. We'll go on living for ever in the afternoon glow..' (p.119). Evidence of this stasis accumulates, until it becomes clear that 'everything's falling back' (p.134).

The system is foolproof, because

Since nearly everyone was satisfied it was lunatic to want to upset everything on the whim of a few. And even more lunatic to think there was any chance of a revolt succeeding. How could it? (p.123)

A group of teenage revolutionaries demonstrate the futility of rebellion, being swiftly and efficiently quelled by the force of an all-powerful system which has intruded so far into the private realm that it has known all along about Rob's defection. Both his 'escape' to the County, and the County's rebellion, are predictably defeated from the start. Rob, as part of the system, is unable to see the injustices before him. He is tempted firstly by the luxury of

County life and then by the offer of becoming one of the Guardians himself. Not until this point does Rob consider the implications of such extreme control. Christopher importantly employs the horror of biological manipulation - the Guardians are ready to practice lobotomy on Rob's best friend, the dissident, Mike - to make Rob, and the implied naive reader, perceive the full horror, and to question, like Brave New World, whether the means justify the ends. Mike's vulnerability is calculated to shock: condemning him to a death-in-life existence. This explains the vacuous docility of men like Mr Gifford, who spends all his days tending bonsai trees:-

..they had opened his skull and nipped out the core of his manhood as he himself might nip out the growing heart of a plant. (p.173)

The language clearly signals that natural life itself is threatened, and men are being manufactured, no longer fully human.

Unlike the classic dystopias, however, Christopher ultimately allows Rob to reject the system by resisting its fatal allure. He is finally invited to become one of the 'Guardians' himself, but has the moral courage to resist this temptation, because he has learnt what the exercise of power really means. Rob's decision suddenly releases him, as his insights coalesce swiftly and forcefully to underscore the moral meaning and the need for resistance. At the novel's close, however, his physical safety is uncertain. Having won the battle within himself, he chooses to return to the Conurb to become a political agitator, rejecting the comforts of the County and a place in the secret elite. Rob ends where he began, although now he can see that he must follow his father's efforts because 'the seed of rebelliousness had been transmitted,' (p.173). The language is more than a little optimistic, and Rob becomes the antithesis to the manufactured, but apparently natural, new world. Perhaps this is meant to suggest Rob's kind may form a new evolutionary line who may yet change the future. Rob intends to meet other revolutionaries, and to follow his father, 'long years behind but following.' (p.175).

Christopher leaves Rob at the point of crossing the wire, perhaps to leave open the possibility that Rob's insurrection will be successful. But the preceding narrative has made

this interpretation seem highly unlikely.⁵⁷ Rob's hopes (in stark contrast with Luke's final sense of personal desolation in the earlier Prince Trilogy) seem naive and childish. It is more likely that readers will predict that Rob will follow in his father's steps and, like him, be 'secretly killed by the police' in his attempt. But Christopher's reluctance to make this resolution more explicit suggests a failure of nerve on the writer's part, who chooses ultimately to use the unwritten conclusion to evade the predictable failure of his morally appealing, transformed protagonist.

If Christopher's work can legitimately be described as formulaic and clichéd, then the work of Kesteven even more clearly exhibits the artistic difficulties of a children's author who chooses to combine the dystopian form with the basic adventure story. The Awakening Water begins in a sinister vein. It describes the life that Watford Nine John leads in a state controlled regime of fear. Set in the near future after economic collapse Kesteven imagines another 'bleak and bitter chillingly possible world'⁵⁸ in which children no longer live with their biological families, but are removed to live in Houses, strictly overseen by Matrons, who threaten them with stories about the dire consequences of non-conformity. The socio-political framework is prominent: the 'Party,' which the children are taught to believe uses political torture and eliminates dissidents, controls every aspect of life, even drugging the water so that people have lost the capacity to question.

Implausibly, John manages to escape this mental conditioning, and escapes the institution which controls him by drinking the forbidden natural river water whilst he is working in the fields. He joins a band of other free children, who adapt to life in the countryside with a resilience and resourcefulness the reader is clearly intended to find admirable. Kesteven clearly maintains a sharp distinction between the free children and the imprisoned populace, arranging his narrative around a series of basic dichotomies. He sets the richness of the natural world against the artificial sterility of the state; the democratic virtues of the children against the autocracy of the Party; and children against the set ways of the adults in the

⁵⁷Hugh Crago op.cit. notes 'Rob's decision at the end is somehow a decision of despair' (p.79) and prefers Dickinson's work, which is less 'facile' and more richly 'ambiguous' (p.79) an attempt at realism.

Christopher's work is often compared with Dickinson's, but Christopher defended himself by claiming to have 'worked out a *raison d'être* for his novels, while Dickinson had not. (See Gough: 1984).

⁵⁸Growing Point 14 (1975) p.2,820.

novel. Most importantly, he pits the individual (John) against the might of the system (the Party).

The children manage to survive, despite their constant fears of being caught. Ultimately, however, they are captured, only to find that their fears of the Party were entirely unfounded. The Party had installed surveillance cameras in the countryside simply to enable the leaders to observe the ways in which these 'honest' children could adapt and use a democratic form of government, and exercise their independence in responsible ways. The Party uses its observations to select those individuals who are worthy of setting up a new society, based on 'pastoral, homely values'⁵⁹ 'beyond the Marsh.' John departs to join this idyllic community at the end of the novel. The optimistic tone of reassurance and future promise is marked by his reunion with his girlfriend.⁶⁰ The two leave, looking forward not only to adult life, but also to a social utopia, being advised benignly: 'You've seen it can work. Now make sure that it does.'

We are told no more, but the optimistic tone of the writing is clearly intended to invite the reader to identify with the children and to 'learn and grow along with the adolescent' protagonist⁶¹. Kesteven uses a relatively 'closed' ending to encourage the reader to converge on the ideological position he wishes to promote. Paradoxically he assumes the reader will adopt this basically passive and acquiescent role so that the reader may be cast as the real hero, by adopting moral responsibility for rewriting the "real world" in Higonnet's sense.

The simple conclusion however, suggests that whereas Christopher was clearly aware of the moral complexities of his stories, Kesteven does not appear to be. The basically simple adventure story is not equal to the complex ideas that have been generated by Kesteven's initial decision to portray a dystopia. The preceding text suggests a range of implied readings which Kesteven, in order to secure ideological closure, simply ignores.

⁵⁹See Stephens (1992) p.128.

⁶⁰Higonnet (1987) notes this union frequently occurs, the foretaste of sexual maturity acting as a form of 'symbolic closure.' p.50

⁶¹See Iskander (1987) p.15

He remains entirely uncritical of the notion of a benign authority, which after all, has proved it will go to any lengths to control its subjects. The new idyll still needs, ironically, to be artificially maintained by the Party. He may assert that the Party is motivated by the desire that the children will eventually become self-reliant and self-propagating, but the preceding text has shown that their moral advantage, 'honesty,' is not one shared by the Party. Furthermore, it is not likely to confer an advantage in terms of survival, particularly when Kesteven's narrative has proved that survival is likely to depend upon physical (technological) strength. Moreover, the selection of a chosen few counteracts the egalitarian democratic principles that Kesteven seems eager to extol. A reader who responds to the ironies of the dystopian elements of the book is equally likely to read 'against' this happy ending.⁶²

The sentimentality of Kesteven's facile resolution may be emotionally reassuring, but is not intellectually satisfying in Scholes' sense. Many other children's texts display a similar tone of confidence and reassurance, largely carried by the ultimate return to normality from which the preceding dystopian scenario has departed. Enid Richemont's powerful dystopia, The Game also suffers from an 'annexed' or 'subjoined' happy ending, in which the dystopia is supplemented by an inorganic addition.

For most of the book Richemont presents a highly controlled future existence which is institutionalised and conditioned. People no longer live in families and are segregated into factions based upon outrageous racial, sexual and religious prejudice. The sexual act has been deliberately polluted by the State, used, as in Orwell's vision, to repulse and control the population. Non-conformists are detested by the masses, who have been conditioned to accept a police state, based upon the absolute dictatorship of 'the Queen'. As in many other juvenile novels, the population's acceptance of 'Hygienic Disposal' is used to indicate that the people have given up the will to live, and have committed themselves to a form of death-in-life existence. 'Naturekill lorries' brutally pour weed killer on all plants which, like human 'misfits', must be exterminated as uncontrollable imperfections.

⁶²Growing Point 16 No.6 (1977) p3,227, 'But where is the free world, in fact, and who rules it? The story remains ambiguous to the end...'

Lucy Four, however, suffers from 'breakthrough memory'. Struggling with her conditioned self, she discovers she is not alone, and travels with Mick across state-imposed social boundaries to learn the horrifying truth underpinning this future-society. She discovers that contemporary problems, such as AIDS, poverty and racial tensions have finally been solved by brainwashing the masses into accepting drastic social reforms. Her autistic friend, Jennie, is being used as a channel of telepathic-like communication to spread the State's subliminal lies, which people are powerless to resist.

Ultimately, however, the narrative rapidly alters course. Against all the odds Mick successfully vandalises the speakers which are installed in every street, and Lucy magically manages to communicate with Jennie by dream, undermining Jennie's 'blank' mind so that she can no longer be exploited as the state's vessel. Mick and Lucy overthrow the state and the masses are finally free, beginning to search for their families again.

This optimistic return-to-normality closure is hugely implausible, relying upon the sudden introduction of the fantasy-technique of telepathic communication, which is inconsistent with the realistic nature of the preceding story. It is undoubtedly intended to guide the reader to a recognition of the need for mental independence (from state-control) and to affirm the qualities of friendship and charity, recollections of which (from life in our present) enable Lucy to confuse Jennie. This obtrusive plotting seems unnecessary in a book which has previously reposed trust in its reader to respond to the ironies of a bleak dystopia.

Richemont continues to heavily code her narrative by pointedly qualifying the revolution's success. An 'Epilogue' counts the human cost of Lucy's victory, by showing the lost Jennie wandering the streets and frequenting the soup kitchens with other social outcasts. Lucy, after all, has betrayed her friend. It is clearly intended to provoke the reader to connect the exaggerated dystopian future with the present day, in which the homeless are already regarded as less than human by contemporary society. This strategy is commonly employed by children's writers, who fail to trust the reader to perceive the fictional world's connections with the real world, and who seem anxious that the reader recognises the

implied optimistic "message" that, for us, it is not too late. Swindells, for example, prefaces Daz 4 Zoe with a 'true' account of old people who have been neglected by contemporary society. He continues patronisingly:

The rest of this book is fiction, but it could come true and we wouldn't like it if it did. You'll see when you've read it. It could come true, but it won't if we're together. All of us.
There's no reason why we shouldn't be. (p.2)

In ensuring that the reader recognises the dangers of human complacency, Richemont risks implying (or expressing her 'real' conviction) that human nature is predictably so flawed - so greedy, cruel and self-seeking - that future change is logically impossible.

John Rowe Townsend also portrays the ultimate overthrow of an invasive and unjust future society in King Creature Come. He envisages a dual society, in which privileged 'Persons' and exploited 'Creatures' are conditioned⁶³ to think of themselves as different species, but the hero, Vector, eventually learns that they are all human: their divisions are artificially imposed and illusory. Vector and Helix, his mentor, eventually heroically lead a successful revolution, enabling the whole population 'to start again from scratch' (p.186).

But whilst Harmony draws attention to the 'energy..and the goodwill' that should result in a better society, Helix regrets the loss of life that their bloody revolt has incurred. 'And', he adds, 'human nature isn't changed at a stroke.' (p.186) Once more, because the plot has relied imaginatively upon a view of evolution which favours the physical survival of the most aggressive individuals, an ironic reading of the optimistic ending is most probable, in which the reader predicts that the new society will be unable to overcome the moral limitations imposed by "human nature". Within the narrative itself the reader is given no alternative means of conceptualising a radically altered species, and so the reassurance implied by the 'open' ending and Vector and Helix's sexual union relies on the unlikely political strategy of teaching the conditioned masses to be free. Townsend seems aware that

⁶³Botten et al. (1983) note that since these characters 'are muted in their ability to feel, there can be little opportunity for the exploration of adolescent characteristics...and there may be hints of didacticism and warning'. p.234.

this is easier said than done, but can imaginatively conceive no alternative within the dystopian framework within which he has placed his characters.

A key feature of the dystopian novel for children is the damaging implausibility of the protagonist's evasion of the ironic consequences of the dystopia in which he is cast. The lucky escape that Kesteven imagines for John is repeated time and again. For example, Swindell's hero, Daz, has an unbelievably lucky escape when he is suddenly rescued by the police when about to be tortured and executed by a murderous gang of vandals. Rabbit and Tia in Hoover's Children of Morrow⁶⁴ are fortunately rescued from maltreatment at the hands of the primitive Base society into which they were born. In Natfact 7 Skip is rescued at the eleventh hour, having been left unconscious by a bomb which is due to explode. Amy and Axel⁶⁵ are saved just in time from a fire which they had used to fend off the authorities who were pursuing them. In Red Zone Slagerman, the hero's brutal assailant, is run over by a truck just as he is about to slaughter Clem. In Hughes' The Tomorrow City, the omnipotent computer, C3, which has 'rationalised' the city until hospitals close and euthanasia is commonly practised, happily destroys itself when it accidentally shoots Caro, (whom it was programmed to protect) blinding, but luckily not killing her.

This list is not intended to suggest that these texts are anything but deeply committed to raising serious questions about human organisations, but it does highlight the ludicrous implausibility of the dystopian protagonist being saved or reformed. The frequency with which some very accomplished children's writers resort to this strategy illustrates a key departure from the classic dystopian novel, which I believe is designed to actually provide a balanced view within the narrative itself, rather than trusting the reader to supply it.

Some novels, such as The Others and Devil On My Back clearly fail to repose such trust to the reader, and the imaginative resolutions are heavily over-coded. In Prince's case the annexed happy ending is ludicrously sentimental. Her powerful dystopia of a biologically engineered future suddenly transforms into a clichéd spy-story to secure a successful outcome to the political agitator, Ergo Norm's, quest. The power-crazed scientist who

⁶⁴H. M. Hoover (New York: Four Winds, 1987)

⁶⁵ Hoover This Time of Darkness (New York: Viking, 1980)

engineered this future has to accidentally kill himself whilst confronting a potential double-agent before the system's control begins to falter. This allows for the emergence of Ergo's nature-loving self, which has been denied by life in Underhill. The book closes sentimentally as clouds, which for Ergo had only existed as 'cherished dreams' finally 'chased across the ragged sky.' The ending of this novel is clearly 'closed', the author's tone suggesting that the situation is bound to improve.

Hughes' resolution to Devil on my Back is less sentimentally conveyed, but equally naive. Tomi finally discovers that his brave new world⁶⁶ is protected by benign rulers, who teach him

What people needed was a change of heart, to stop being so smug and to start to dream real dreams.

The narrative resolution empowers Tomi to alter people's consciousness by working in 'Dreamland,' where he is responsible for engineering the dreams of others. He intends 'to give men and women dreams of how they might reach out and risk' and learn to live...' (p169) The preceding dystopia has proved the irony of this intended revisioning, however. ArcOne was, after all, founded on a similar dream-vision, intended, like Noah's ark, to help people start again after things had 'gone wrong'. Tomi is not as free as he would appear, nor can he be in the dystopian context, in which all individuals are cast principally as victims of the state. Tomi is 'really' powerless, unable to dream in the way Hughes seems keen to suggest.

Sleator's The House of Stairs⁶⁷ illustrates the dilemmas the dystopia presents to the children's writer who seeks to secure an optimistic outcome to his story. The book is a surreal and powerfully imaginative vision in which five children, all recruited from local orphanages, are confined in a nightmare structure of stairs which lead nowhere. They must learn to respond to particular stimuli to obtain food from a machine. Gradually the stimuli are altered so that the children must embarrass and eventually physically hurt each other to

⁶⁶ Which one reviewer sees as a 'prediction' *Growing Point* 23 No.3 (1984) p.4,309

⁶⁷ William Sleator (New York: EP Dutton, 1974. Rpt. London:MacDonald, 1988)

earn their sustenance. This is an extreme form of conditioning. Three children are perfectly prepared to comply with such conditions, whilst two feel they must naturally resist the necessity for cruelty and hate. The morally superior children must ultimately face the dilemma of death by starvation or their better natures must succumb in defeat to the machine's conditions. Eventually they will have no other choice.

Sleator, however, rescues them, choosing to evade the ultimate consequences of the dystopian scenario he has adopted. At the moment that the children's will is about to break

Fortunately, it was well before they reached the others that they heard the whirring above them, and looked up to see the lift coming down to take them away (p.143)

An 'Epilogue' finally fully explains the mystery of the house of stairs,⁶⁸ exchanging rich metaphoric ambiguity for a rational, literal mode of telling. The machine was operated by a scientist who masterminded the psychological experiment to prove that humans could be conditioned to 'perform with maximum efficiency' (p.151) His three 'successes' will form a perfect special corps of amoral leaders who will unquestioningly implement inhumane political changes, which the President has requested. The two children who maintained their principles are regarded by the scientists as failures with 'severe and undetected abnormalities' who will threaten and spoil the perfect system.

It seems hugely improbable that a government which would go to the lengths of deliberately creating children as monsters, and whose 'normal' view of human nature is so debased, would show any compassion for its 'failures'. But Sleator resists portraying their defeat, having them triumph

..they had risen above the system, above the machine. They had won, there was no better/ feeling than that; and now they were to be sent away. Sent away to a place where people might be like themselves; a place where things would be different, and perhaps better. (pp.154/155)

⁶⁸ Bryan Jenkins feels that 'the idea of conditioning makes for an intriguing story - spoiled by a final chapter of explanation: better to be left with an ambiguous ending' in The Signal Selection of Children's Books 1988 ed. N. Chambers p.43

The fact remains, however much Sleator seeks to disguise it, that the children's moral supremacy would have resulted in their physical defeat, and was likely to break, like Winston's moral will, under pressure.

At deeper imaginative levels, I believe all these child-protagonists are intended to convey the hope of a new start, which is usually conceived along pastoral lines of recovery. Frequently a boy and girl unite, suggesting a new Adam and Eve who leave, perhaps to propagate a new species elsewhere, in a natural landscape in which variety is valued, not wiped out. The frequency with which writers suggest a pastoral utopia suggests they are searching for a new way of expressing change. This runs deeper than a simple attempt to redefine social history in the future, but suggests a completely new start for the species itself. As a resolution to the dystopic narrative, however, it seems unrealistic and naively evasive. The Vandal ends, for instance, with two teenagers making for 'settlements' with seed to 'barter.' Schlee strikes an uncharacteristically sentimental tone on the final page:

Sharon waited...ready to leave on the long walk towards the sun which hesitated for them on the western horizon.(p.173)

In Daz 4 Zoe, the two youngsters climb a hill to look back at the divided city, gaining a sense of distance from which the two zones merge and they can see humanity, whole '...it was impossible to tell where the city ended and the suburb began.' (p.165) Zoe idealistically and happily claims

Instead of the end we were moving toward the beginning of something. I knew we were, I felt it getting closer (p.164)

Many writers use the open-ending to imply that the two can overcome the artificial divisions of their upbringing, having grown and learned throughout the novel. In Red Zone, Clem and Kara, a couple from different zones unite to live off the land in a Paradisal valley, where 'The work he did made Clem feel alive' (p.98) Hoover's This Time Of Darkness is resolved when the two children escape their underground existence and join an idyllic village where the air is pure and people live long and healthy lives.

These novels all vary in the degree of resolution offered, but to some extent all the morally attractive young protagonists find personal fulfilment. Some, like The Vandal, appear to suggest that future revolution will be possible. Paul finally sees evidence of other vandals fighting the system by burning the domes under which they are forced to work. Often the author, like Christopher, tries to maintain a focus upon the ironic mode of the preceding narrative, by casting a shadow of doubt over the protagonists' future. Just before the climactic escape of the two teenagers in Daz 4 Zoe, for example, Zoe's love for Daz is tested, like Winston's for Julia. Like Winston, she discovers that, when required to save his life by losing her own, her love is not sufficiently strong. This fact, she observes, '...screws you up.' This detail seems designed to pollute the optimistic resolution of their romantic union, qualifying the final reassuring tone and forcing the reader to question human nature itself. It easily suggests, however, that the 'open' ending is being used as an evasive tactic by the writer, rather than one which is truly committed to the stated intention to make the reader think.

So far in this chapter I have documented how the inherent problems of the dystopian form have been exaggerated by the perceived moral and technical constraints of the children's writer. The results have been largely disappointing. Certainly there is nothing which begins to equal the profound imaginative coherence of Orwell's dystopian writing. I will now turn to the few writers who have been inclined to repose more trust in the reader to respond to irony. As a result, the texts I am about to consider imply an older teenage, or young adult audience, which is predicted to be more mature, more intellectually confident and more accomplished at decoding texts than the hitherto fairly straightforward narratives have generally implied. The political intelligence of these books is considerably heightened, particularly in the work of Westall and Mark.

It is significant that the books I am about to discuss try to push back the boundaries of the juvenile text. The imaginative consistency of the writing is due largely to the levels of irony the author is prepared to employ in these dystopian novels. An exploration of the evolutionary metaphor underpinning the texts reveals an anarchic, violent energy which is used to characterise remnant human nature in these dark futures. This is linked

imaginatively to the bestial or the devil in an ironic inversion of human ideals, in an attempt to force the reader to question human nature.⁶⁹ These authors risk empowering their protagonists, and risk playing out the devastating consequences of their actions. This, these writers suggest to a young readership, is what the traditional concept of heroism *really* means in the dystopian scenario. Once this path has been taken the only conceivable alternative is a destructive or self-destructive violence. These texts present more challenging and pessimistic visions of the human species than is customary in writing for the young.

Louise Lawrence's first novel, *Andra*⁷⁰ does not entirely escape an overly schematic design, but the narrative is arranged experimentally around a series of viewpoints of a death-in-life underground existence two thousand years in the future. Sub-City One has allowed physical, but not spiritual survival, following the devastating ecological ruin which has made surface life impossible. A strict yet benevolent totalitarian regime has emerged which demands efficiency and utter conformity. Often the surface ideology has a superficial admonitory stridency which undermines the artistic success of the work:

...we destroyed it. We, with our great machines, destroyed every living thing and condemned ourselves to creep like worms beneath the surface. My ancestors made me worse than a slug...To crawl...where even the air we breathe is manufactured...There is no love, no happiness. This is not living..This is merely existing...(p.63)

I am interested in Lawrence's imaginative realisation of a character who is capable of experiencing the inadequacies of the City. Andra is, like Bernard, and Winston, 'imperfect'. Following an accident she becomes unacceptable to the City, but is surgically recreated, grafted with the preserved brain of Richard Carson, a boy from 1987. In this way Lawrence makes Andra's ability to 'remember' the time before Earth's decimation seem plausible rather than fantastic. Andra is capable of representing a different way of seeing life, becoming the sole survivor of a 'human nature' which has not been robotically conditioned to endure mechanical existence underground.

⁶⁹ *Growing Point* 16 No. 6 (1977) p. 3,414 'Mark has gone further than any writer I know...in suggesting a different kind of human nature...Mark has given us a clear and challenging glimpse of one possible direction for our species.'

⁷⁰ (Harlow: Longman, 1971)

Andra appears to become the symbol of hope in the novel. She alone holds the key to future biological survival, because it transpires that a new planet, 801, has been located, which may support human life. The City pins its hopes not only on the new start, but on Andra's natural instincts, which they believe will allow her to adapt to surface life and teach others to do the same.

For much of the novel, however, the hope 801 represents is not disclosed, and Andra is trapped, a frustrated rebel, the only individual capable of experiencing the stultifying monotony of the City and of realising that life could be different. Her agitating presence has, predictably, little significance for the others. Lawrence spells out the fact that, for the conditioned masses, freedom can only be:

..something vague, something we can't define../ We can't have freedom because we're denied self-expression. (pp.145/146)

In this context Andra is a dangerous presence. Her forbidden long hair and her sharp brooch represent her dangerously attractive beauty and individualism. Incapable of offering an alternative, Andra is bent on destroying the public values which have sustained the population, undermining the peaceable City. She uses her brooch as a weapon, severing the artery of someone who disagrees with her, spilling a shocking amount of blood. Shenlyn observes 'It looks pretty dangerous. Just like you, Andra.' (p.211)

Once the presence of 801 is revealed, Andra's wild nature becomes the means of future hope, but Lawrence continues to stress Andra's ruthless lack of concern for others, having Andra heartlessly explain what survival on 801 will mean 'some die, some live. Does it matter how many die as long as some live?' (p.279) Because Lawrence unequivocally portrays the laws of nature being governed by a natural competition which is taken to mean the most ruthless will survive, her visionary maverick is not capable of representing a morally attractive future development of the human species. The potential rebel is identified with destruction rather than with the saintly ideal. Andra's opportunism celebrates a kind of

wild justice, which only recognises the need to adapt to the demands of present circumstances, a message, as Harrison observes,⁷¹ we are reluctant to offer to our young.

The novel is resolved without compromise, insofar as Andra, like the protagonists of the 'adult' dystopias, is finally destroyed. The City's shuttle is sabotaged in the race to gain 801 by another more ruthless regime of survivors. As it departs, passengerless, Andra runs towards it, and is killed by the icy air as the hangar doors open.

The ironic ending may appear to be less open to the reader's interpretation than some other texts I have discussed. The shock of Andra's death, however, paradoxically places more onus on the reader to engage seriously with the ideas the text seeks to raise about humanity's organisations and biological nature, than the superficially more 'open' endings of books which allow their protagonists to survive in an improving political context.

Andra's physical fate may be pessimistically resolved, but her motives remain ambiguous, leaving room for the slim possibility that she believed she was saving the City by trying to open the roof manually before the ship tore them apart. This view may raise her moral stature, but it is equally likely that Andra sought death, like Huxley's John, as a gesture of despair or protest which the others can never hope to appreciate. The novel ends with the citizens' puzzled confusion: 'There was no need for Andra to go in there.'

Whatever significance is attributed to Andra's death, it is importantly a significance that is loaded by the reader, rather than imposed by the text. I believe her defeat, as the sole 'living' entity in the future world, cautions more effectively against ecological irresponsibility than 'stereotypical formulas of virtue which are automatically triumphant or miraculously preserved.'⁷² The ending is wholly consistent with the preceding narrative, which traces the dire consequences of human behaviours.

⁷¹Harrison (1987) p.82

⁷² S. Iskander (1987) p.18

In Westall's brilliant anti-utopia, *Futuretrack 5*,⁷³ every apparent ideal ultimately reveals its ironic opposite. Like *1984*, this society has taken the state penetration of individual privacy to the bitter extreme. Law is brutally enforced by military Paramils, who use 'psychopters' to invade people's minds. Non-conformists are lobotomised. The regime is controlled by a central computer, which becomes a chilling metaphor for the inhumane rationalism which underpins the system. A terrifying logic upholds the rigid hierarchy of classes and underclasses. The unemployed 'Unnems' are no longer materially useful to society, and are written off, controlled by their lusts playing violent competitive games. The 'Futuretracks' have been designed to occupy their time. Here they race on motorbikes or obsessively play violent video games to fulfil their apparent need for the thrill of adventure.

This is a dark world, which, unusually in the children's dystopian novel, does not repudiate comedy.⁷⁴ Westall creates a dark satire, which is funny, but the humour is distinctly black. Positive human relationships are utterly excluded, and the novel focuses attention on putrefaction and corruption, a decayed moral state in which, like *1984*, society's spiritual malaise is expressed in images of physical repulsiveness and sickness. Startling and grotesque images abound: the mutilated face of an Unnem who has literally cut off his nose to spite his face; blood and filth; the spotty face of a Tech; the pale, thin legs of Kitson's room-mate, Sellars. The computer, Laura, is suitably housed in a toilet, having been constructed and operated by Idris, a sweaty, stale, drooling wreck of a man, whose creative technical genius is ironically channelled toward self-destruction. His masterpiece, Laura, is shaped like a metallic angel. Idris built her as an artistic response to the intense distress of being rejected by his lover many years ago, which left him a broken man.

Laura is, like her namesake, entirely heartless, and ironically continues to wreck lives on a massive scale. She has no inkling of morality, and so her search for the perfect social system fails to take people's spiritual welfare into account. She has designed the futuretracks, not simply to entertain the masses, but ironically to exterminate them. The most determined, aggressive individuals are accurately predicted to compete so fiercely that they will kill themselves, and 'accidents' are actually ensured, because the machinery they play with is

⁷³Robert Westall *Futuretrack 5* (Harmondsworth: Kestrel, 1983 rpt. Puffin Plus, 1985)

⁷⁴See Peter Hollindale 'Westall's Kingdom' *CLE* 25 No.3 (Sept.1994) p.152: '*Futuretrack 5* is a satire'

deliberately faulty, and lethal. This way potential dissidents are 'skimmed off' and the rest can be led like sheep.

The novel's teenage protagonist, the middle-class Est, Henry Kitson, gradually begins to repudiate the apparent thrill of the underclasses' future tracks (although ironically only out of self-interest, because the girl he lusts after, Keri, is endangered by her obsession with racing). He begins what looks like a quest to put an end to the social atrocities of his world, and starts to uncover the devastating truth of the system. Eventually he learns that one individual, Scott Astbury, plots a final solution to the problem of unemployment. He plans a repopulation scheme, which means exterminating the troublesome underclass and restocking the country with a race of gentle idiots, the Fenlanders.

Once Kitson discovers this dark truth he resolves to rebel and destroy the system. This decision, however, ironically identifies him with the diabolic Blocky, who is appallingly 'ugly, hating, destructive, pointless, but still human.' Blocky provides Kitson with the only hope of challenging the status quo, but it is clear that this way is no more moral than Laura's:

Blocky was pushing me down the road to Hell fast enough already...Blocky had reached some diabolical nirvana where everything was funny, including death and the lobo farm. (p.147)

Kitson's dreams of chaos and of putting an end to the system are ironically thwarted by his own nature. The earliest stages of the novel have shown that, when life is 'so bloody rational', physical survival depends upon having 'enough basic aggression.' Kitson has survived because he is more aggressive and more ambitious than the others: he is a product of a world in which kindness has no meaning. We have seen how he '...didn't give a damn for any of them.' (p.37)

Kitson is an anti-hero: only attractive insofar as he refuses to be beaten by the system. He is determined to fight power with power, opportunistically turning to the only means nature provides him with, his own capacity for violence. This readily suggests that humans are fundamentally evil, for Kitson draws his energy from the demonic. This works blatantly

against idealism and heroic possibility, explaining why so few children's writers dare to suggest this reading as prominently as Westall.

So although ultimately it seems that Kitson's storming of the stronghold in which Laura is kept has been successful, and he delivers her a tape which acts as a 'truth bomb of ethics,' Westall finally insists that Kitson has, inevitably failed. The story darkens relentlessly. Predictably today's rebel becomes tomorrow's tyrant. Immediately he finds he has to instruct Laura to

"Keep making the old decisions, until we find a new way."

"There is no other way," sneered Sellars. "It's not changeable. You'll be as bad as all the rest. Already you need the Paramils. Soon you'll need the lobo farm." (p.250)

The insurrection has, ironically, only resulted in the death of Pete, the one selfless individual upon whom Kitson could depend, and whose guileless trust Kitson has betrayed. Westall's only compromise at the end of the novel is to rescue him from seeking 'black...sick' revenge on Scott Astbury, who has already died. The novel closes with Kitson's devastating realisation that he is powerless to change a thing. He must remain with Laura forever. His final words recognise the full irony of his situation

I was going to be a prisoner here for the rest of my life. (p.253)

Kitson's absolute imprisonment resolves the novel ironically. His quest for freedom has brought about his metaphorical suicide. This ending acts as an ironic correlative to the prior experience of Idris, Laura's creator, reinforcing the whole novel's theme of entrapment. Furthermore, Idris literally committed suicide. Kitson's imprisonment is also the prophetic emblem of completion, bringing about his final insight. At last, like Winston, he is able to discard his conception of himself as an active agent of change and realise resignedly that, in his world, nothing can be done. This forces the reader to formulate an alternative to the book's world,⁷⁵ by questioning its unattractive features and feeling 'rage at the miscarriage of justice.'⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See *Growing Point* 22 No 5 (1983) p. 4, 194 'Open-ended but bleakly chilling, the conclusion of Futuretrack 5 suggests a pessimistic view of human nature....[but] should induce argument, not pessimism.'

⁷⁶ Iskander (1987) p.14.

Only Mark's The Ennead consistently carries through the implications of the dystopian scenario to their inevitable ironic conclusions. The book opens with humanity ruining the chance of a new start on another fertile planet. Having already wrecked Earth, man is predicted to replicate the same mistakes again, proving himself incapable of self-regulation. Now humanity has forced itself into having to live on the unattractive and drab Erato. Determined not to make the same mistakes again, strict laws are enforced on Erato, which seems, to outsiders, to represent a utopia. Full employment has been achieved, and many apply to become immigrants.

It is soon clear, however, that the rule

ONE MAN, ONE JOB
NO UNEMPLOYMENT

exacts a price. The inverse is really true, anyone without a job ceases to exist, and is deported. Deportation means certain death, because no one can withstand the lengthy journey elsewhere. On Erato, all relationships are governed by the economic principles of greedy self-interest and debt. Everyone struggles to compete with each other, swindling and cheating and tricking the system, bribing others and informing on their neighbours. Even brothers will betray one another for their own selfish materialistic ends. The horror is that this merely reflects human nature, it does not create it so. The system suits the people of Erato. Isaac, the unlikeable teenage protagonist explains: 'It's not a government law [to attend the repressive church services], it's our law.' (p.142)

Two characters are imported, being seen by those on Erato as status symbols. One is an artist, Eleanor, and the other a gardener, Moshe. Before Eleanor arrives Isaac deviously tries to secure her favours by ensuring she will be indebted to him. He idealises his lust by imagining the sculptor will be a perfect courtly lover, and he supposes she resembles his (mistaken) idea of her namesake, Eleanor of Aquitaine. The real woman is ugly and wilful,

however, shattering his hopes. She falls in love with Moshe, and Isaac extorts money from them to keep their illegal love a secret.

Ultimately Moshe is persecuted, not because of his union with Eleanor (which everyone is happy to ignore, because they all extort money from him to keep quiet) but because he refuses to give up his own identity. Moshe is deported, and Eleanor attempts to make people see the atrocities that the system perpetrates. She believes that she can make people see the injustice which underpins their lives. The people, however, publicly stone her, standing by a system which suits them.

Only Isaac appears to have a change of heart, and helps Eleanor to escape into the mountains. He realises that this is a suicidal gesture,⁷⁷ because life here will be impossible. He fully recognises

"There is no escape, Eleanor. I've gained you an hour, no more." (p.249)

But Eleanor explodes any notion that Isaac is really capable of moral action, he has actually, like Kitson, 'gone to the devil.' Unable to transcend his polluted view of human relationships, he has simply used Eleanor 'as a way of easing' his conscience. (p.289) She strips him of his last vestige of hope, removing the possibility that he is capable of altruistic action or radical transformation. He discovers he is not imprisoned by the city, nor its laws, but by his own self-seeking nature, which he is powerless to escape. Ironically Isaac's pursuit of freedom actually reveals his spiritual bankruptcy. In this novel, as in The Travelling Man, daunting biological questions are prominent. It is clear that the future is being used as a context in which to see human nature itself, in horrifyingly exaggerated form. Mark warns that such human nature cannot fit into the scheme of life, and humanity habitually destroys its habitat and itself. In The Ennead, the best in human nature has been destroyed, to warn about the consequences of its loss.⁷⁸ In this way Mark's vision clearly draws near to that of Golding. The fact that hope is not supplied within the text itself means

⁷⁷ See Wehemeyer (1981) p.125: 'Finally..Isaac makes a conscious choice against survival.'

⁷⁸ See Growing Point 16 No. 6 (1977) p. 3,413, 'These are people, with arms, legs, eyes and speech like our own, but they are not like us, they are terrifyingly alien, their personalities shaped by cold, distance, stone.'

that Mark is able to achieve greater imaginative cohesion in The Ennead than has been achieved by many of the books I have documented in this chapter. It also importantly means that readers of her novel are entrusted to think for themselves.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEFECTS OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE SEARCH FOR 'HOMO MORALIS': VERSIONS OF LORD OF THE FLIES

I have suggested in earlier chapters that children's futuristic fiction seems disposed to raise daunting questions about human nature, much in the manner of Golding's Lord of the Flies. I have decided in this chapter to concentrate on the post-holocaust novel to discuss this issue, simply for the sake of clear illustration: because this tendency is most clearly visible in this worst-case scenario. This should not be taken to mean that the problems of presenting a bleak, or 'realistic' view of human nature are merely confined to post-atomic texts.

Although Lord of the Flies is not a futuristic text, it shares important narrative techniques with the classic dystopian novel. Golding himself has described his work as an 'antiutopia.' Reflecting on the idea of utopian writing, he observes that 'the true reason for the invention of an antiutopia ' is that 'the antiutopian wants to be proved wrong. No antiutopian / desires to hurt.'¹

Golding's 'pessimistic tale'², which presents a violent and dark vision of evil at the heart of man, is sufficiently well-known to need scant introduction. By the end of the novel the schoolboys marooned in the middle of an atomic war have played out a radically different version of the survival story from that depicted by Ballantyne's Coral Island (1858). Golding's boys have destroyed their island, have hunted a boy down in cold blood, have recklessly allowed a small child to die in a fire and have killed another in a frenzied mob attack. Worse still, one boy has been deliberately murdered. The ideas of harmless boyish fun and conviviality have been starkly replaced by vicious savagery and an aggressive blood lust. The whole novel underscores man's inherent capacity for cruelty, which here triumphs over, indeed excludes, genial co-operation. Golding starkly focuses upon human nature itself, rather than its artefacts.

Golding has argued that the purpose of the book is 'to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature,' to argue that the shape of society must depend on the ethical

¹William Golding 'Utopias and AntiUtopias' in *A Moving Target* (London: Faber, 1982) p.182-183.

²Kathleen Woodward 'On Aggression: William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*', in Rabkin E.S. ed. No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dytopian Fiction (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1983) p.199.

nature of the individual, rather than an imposed political system. Golding significantly uses the language of evolution as moral metaphor, publicly forwarding his belief that

With bad people, hating, unco-operative, selfish people, no social system will work. With good people, loving, co-operative, unselfish people, any social system will work. It is, then, a moral question. Well, we have had ... *homo habilis*, *homo neanderthalis*...*homo sapiens* - has nature done with us? Surely we can search that rapacious sleeve and find something a bit better! We had better *decide* we are Lamarkian and make it work. We must produce *homo moralis*...³

He arranges his narrative to make this agenda clear. Instead of implying the need for moral change, however, Golding's novel is often taken to 'prove' the point that no social system can work, because the ideal of genial co-operation amongst men has been shown to be unreal. Critics like Woodward have suggested that the novel appears not to be primarily 'moved by the impulse that social change is possible and necessary,' because 'Golding believes that the bottom line, the limiting factor, is human nature, of which he has a bleak and pessimistic view. Man is inherently evil and weak, and human nature is fixed, make no mistake about it.'⁴ Despite exercising strict control over the meaning of his work, the admonitory nature of his fiction (and his use of irony) means that the novel's significance is implied, rather than stated.

Lord of the Flies presents the reader with a dark interpretation of 'human nature' which is so extreme that it serves as a clear warning. It consciously enforces a simplicity of outlook, expressing fears to such a degree that it forces the consequences of contemporary thinking, not simply about social organisation, but essentially about what we are. Golding's fiction attempts to 'make man aware of what he is doing' in the hope that 'we may learn to be temperate, provident, taking no more from nature's treasury than is our due.'⁵

The stark terms of his narrative are designed to control his moral meaning, and Golding himself preferred the term 'fable' to describe what he was trying to achieve, saying,

³op.cit. p.184

⁴op.cit. p.203.

⁵op.cit. p.212

..the fabulist is a moralist...Arranging signs as he does he reaches, not profundity on many levels, but what you would expect from signs, that is, overt significance.

Much critical commentary has tellingly responded to this feature. Peters recognises that 'it gives the impression that...purpose is anterior'⁶ and Babb notes that Golding's method is 'radically conditioned by meaning...the entire fictional structure ...is created with a view to its significance.'⁷ Woodward recognises that Lord of the Flies has a 'programmatic intent - Golding intends to 'prove' a hypothesis...', the fiction being used (like Brave New World) to forward an argument, asking the reader primarily to approach it 'as if we were appraising a scientific experiment.'⁸

In this respect Golding's work bears striking similarities to the classic dystopias of the previous chapter. Like them, it works 'like a fictional laboratory experiment whose outcome can be predicted with accuracy.'⁹ In my view Golding's vision is also purely speculative, presenting what Scholes describes as a 'noticeable discontinuity with our current situation - but insisting that this altered situation is not actually discontinuous, that it is in fact a reasonable projection of existing trends.'¹⁰ The main difference is that whilst Orwell and Huxley's work emphasised social questions, Golding emphasises biological questions. Instead of 'realistically' projecting the outcomes of technology and political institutions, he emphasises a projected version of 'human nature.' However 'realistic' the portrayal may seem,¹¹ Golding nevertheless similarly shocks the reader by presenting an exclusively bleak model of the world against which we may assess our own.

Like Orwell and Huxley, Golding relies upon irony to carry his didacticism, requiring the reader to 'move beyond the fictional work itself and... into the real world.'¹² He portrays a fictional world in which the cruel sadist, Jack, is unalterably dominant. Golding uses the evolutionary metaphor to underscore his moral meaning and 'argue' for moral responsibility, so that Jack comes to represent a version of 'human nature' which relishes the opportunity

⁶cited by Howard Babb The Novels of William Golding (Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1970)p.33

⁷op.cit. p.15

⁸op.cit p. 204

⁹ibid. p.204

¹⁰Scholes (1975) p.72

¹¹See Woodward p.199; B. Dick in William Golding (New York: Twayne, 1967)p.18

¹²Woodward p.204

to hurt and to kill. This is portrayed unequivocally as a retrograde evolutionary step. The boys descend into savagery, replicating a Biblical Fall.

Golding consciously presents a view of evolution which has favoured man's innate capacity for aggression as 'man the hunter.' He always signals that this descent is a question of morality, and is not dictated by the amoral 'laws of the jungle,' because the boys are placed in a land of plenty. The island is a paradise in which there is no need to kill for physical survival. In this way Golding shows that his marooned boys attempt to use the laws of biological necessity as feeble excuses for the illusory amorality of their actions. Jack, for example, lamely claims that he neglected the fire which was crucial to their hopes of rescue because 'We needed meat.' (p.89)

What he displays, however, is a short-term, immoral desire for instant gratification and narcissistic self-absorption being placed over a sense of responsibility for others and a concern for the future.

By casting children as the main protagonists Golding not only ironically inverts the romantic ideal of childhood innocence, but ensures that, from the early stages, the reader is likely to accept the possibility of his fictional model, because we are (as adult readers) accustomed to believing children really do behave in this way. Gradually, however, Golding arranges his narrative to make it perfectly plain that the 'game' -which Hildick describes as a 'gleeful witch-hunt' - is morally reprehensible. The language describing Jack's initial hunt shows that he wickedly revels in blood. Golding depicts this as a demonic pleasure, not a matter of amoral physical need. The reader may, from the outset, accurately predict that Jack's cruelty will soon extend to boys, rather than simply animals, for the signs are already there. Jack tellingly hates the aptly named Piggy from the start. Chillingly he parallels Hitler's actions, who similarly vindicated the Pogroms by distorting the principles of social Darwinism. By seeing Piggy as an animal, Jack views him as an inferior species to which anything may be done under the guise of the survival of the fittest.

Golding arranges his narrative to make it abundantly clear that Jack distorts natural law, because even if aggression is inherent in human nature, there is no need for its pathological expression.¹³ Later in the novel it is obvious that there is no natural need to hunt down Simon, nor Ralph. To make his point Golding deliberately distorts the characteristic of ruthless aggression in the human species. Most of the boys can only be seen in one way: they represent a view of human nature in which the aggressive urge is so strong that their actions can be predicted to lead inexorably to the destruction not only of their own kind, but of themselves.

Golding warns of a paradise which, once lost, may not be regained. Jack's hunters systematically begin to remove the possibility of their own physical survival, by repeatedly soiling or setting fire to the island upon which their lives depend. By the end of the book the paradise has been literally reduced to an uninhabitable inferno, leaving only a 'burning wreckage.' As the novel progresses the movement from dream to nightmare is reflected in the narrative structure. The first section portrays the paradise, in which the boys' hopes of fun and imminent rescue are signified by the conch, an object of natural beauty. Ideals of co-operation and justice are soon replaced by the pig's head, and the 'sign' sent from the adult world that death and decay are the central reality. Woodward claims that by dubbing the sow's head "Lord of the Flies" or Beelzebub, Golding 'alludes directly to the devil, or evil in man.' There is no ambiguity about this, it is a 'plain reference, plainly stated.'¹⁴ Golding consistently arranges his narrative, like the classic dystopias, to drive the plot in the single direction of ironic decline. Apparently harmless ideals consistently precipitate disaster: 'innocent' games bring death, anarchy and, ultimately extinction. It is significant that Golding has chosen to depict an exclusively male population: here too we see a fictional world in which the traditionally 'feminine' characteristics, co-operation, altruism, nurture, love, protection are almost entirely excluded. In literal and metaphoric terms the society is sterile and therefore doomed.

But, as in the classic dystopias, Golding needs characters which will make the horrifying consequences of his warning felt. Ralph, Piggy and Simon do possess the vestiges of their

¹³See Woodward p.217

¹⁴ibid. p.201

'sometime clean' selves. Via them, Golding presents an alternative view of human nature. They cling to their ideals, like Winston, believing that there is another way, which they ironically connect with adult behaviour. Adults, says Piggy, would have tea and discuss, and things would be all right. His faith is important. Although his trust in protective adults is ironically misplaced, it nevertheless displays a fundamental belief in the survival value of geniality. Piggy points out the fact that, in evolutionary terms, humanity has evolved the capacity to communicate and resolve differences without the need to resort to violence. It makes available a reading of human nature in which altruistic responsibility is not simply an imposed taboo, but is inherent. These three boys represent humanity's natural capacity for justice and co-operation. They attempt to shelter the littl'uns, they would share whatever they own, they work hard to protect the natural beauty of the island, attempting to instil responsible principles in the younger boys.

But because the novel promotes a dominant view of evolution which relies on aggression, like Orwell, Golding depicts the way in which their enclave is overwhelmed. All three boys are physically weak and vulnerable. Piggy is asthmatic and short-sighted, Simon epileptic. Both seem hopelessly unsuited for physical survival and both are murdered. Only Ralph is physically strong, his weakness lies ironically in his moral idealism, which blinds him, like the rationalist, Piggy, to Jack's brutality. He cannot see that the hunters have no individual integrity. They are not like Ralph in any way. By the end of the novel their conch has become 'white and fragile,' no match for Jack's demonic principles. Admittedly Ralph has the capacity for unthinking aggression, he is swept along in the frenzy of Simon's murder, which begins to drive home to him the awful moral truth which must be rejected at all costs. But whereas Ralph is a fatally divided character, who has evolved the capacity for the self-regulation brought about by an innate feeling for ethical values, (shown by his instinctive revulsion at murder) the others are beasts, purely and simply.

To underline his warning, and the urgent necessity for a redefinition of the human species, Golding, like Orwell, relies upon shocking the reader by portraying what the absolute absence of humanity will mean. Maurice is only prevented from throwing sand in the eyes of a small boy because of the threat of external taboos. Once these taboos, imposed upon the

child from the adult world, are removed, Maurice is predicted to become capable of calculated violence. But the fact that the pathological expression of violence probably shocks the reader, and Jack and Maurice are likely to seem like monsters, suggests that Golding has arranged his narrative to make a statement about preferred morality, which is carried by the reader's response to the ironic mode. Golding's narrative seems designed to summon up in the reader precisely those innate feelings which are a mark of 'real' human nature. If the reader feels compassion for Ralph, and hopes that he will be rescued, if readers feel horror and pity for Piggy, then they are actively drawing upon the 'natural' emotional responses which humanity has evolved to act as prohibitions to aberrant violence.

In one sense, then, Golding's extreme view of the beast within may be calculated not to match with our more complete sense of 'human nature.' Lord of the Flies depicts violence as typical, to underline the moral meaning. The fictional world does not display what Gould describes as

a cruel structural asymmetry [which] grants to rare events of meanness such power to shape our history...I allow that dark forces have often kept balances, but still strongly assert that we fail to count the ten thousand ordinary acts of nonaggression that overwhelm each overt show of strength... social stability rules nearly all the time and must be based on an overwhelmingly predominant (but tragically ignored) frequency of genial acts.¹⁵

In Lord of the Flies geniality is scarcely evident and meanness is commonplace. Golding uses the metaphor of extinction to demonstrate what may happen if the morally desirable elements of human nature are tragically ignored in this sense. He, like Orwell, uses the ironic mode to demonstrate powerfully the need to 'put the commonplace in the driver's seat of history.'¹⁶ This moral meaning is expressed implicitly in his depiction of 'a perverted social structure'¹⁷ in which the tribe's aggression is exaggerated to a point at which it is not rare, but typical.

¹⁵Stephen Jay Gould (1993) p.282

¹⁶ibid. p.283

¹⁷ibid. p. 281

As a natural scientist Gould (like Lorenz, Wilson,¹⁸ and Greenleaf¹⁹) laments the tendency to regard aggression as having a metaphysical dimension, because by seeing it as 'bestial' we render it inexplicably inevitable. Recognising that the idea of 'the beast within' can be used imaginatively to 'make a statement about hope or preferred morality,' he is concerned about a possible misreading: that it easily leaves the impression that

...people are aggressive, and intrinsically so...Unfortunately, one incident of violence can undo ten thousand acts of kindness, and we easily forget the predominance of kindness over aggression by confusing effect with frequency...But this tragic fact does not imply that behavioural traits of the dark side define the essence of human nature. On the contrary, I would argue, by analogy to the history-making in evolution, that the reality of human interactions at almost any moment of our daily lives runs contrary, and must in any stable society, to the rare and disruptive events that construct history.' (p.281)

In short, aggression is innate in man, but its pathological expression is not. Lord of the Flies uses evolutionary theory as an imaginative fabrication to make a moral point. I must stress that I am not arguing that Golding should be reproached for his apparent scientific inaccuracy. Golding clearly intends that the reader takes his fictional world as moral metaphor, not literal fact. I am using Gould's argument to help to illuminate not that Golding's beliefs are faulty, but that he is using a hypothesis to make a statement about preferred morality by issuing a warning *ex negativo*. The danger, particularly for a children's writer who uses the same imaginative fabrication, is that a literal reading engenders despair. Despite the strict control Golding exerts over the significance of his story, received meanings will vary.

Golding's heavily ironic ending, in which the officer 'rescues' the children, but clearly represents the technological capacity for nuclear aggression on a scale which was unavailable to the boys, underlines the urgent need to value co-operation and communication, before it is too late. The Bomb becomes the fictional nemesis for human evil. The reader may respond by examining the social and ethical issues at stake within the novel, being actively propelled into the search for '*homo moralis*'. Alternatively, true hopelessness will result if the reader concludes (as indeed perhaps Golding truly believes)

¹⁸See Woodward pp.212-219

¹⁹See Sarah Greenleaf 'The Beast Within' pp.49-57

that human nature is so constituted that people cannot help their actions. The second response is clearly an uncomfortable outcome for children's writers who similarly choose to 'point to the necessity of human interaction and understanding here and now...*ex negativo*'.²⁰

Perhaps at first it seems surprising that most children's writers who choose to base their futuristic novels upon the worst-case scenario of nuclear war choose to exaggerate the horrifying elements of Golding's story (for example, the putrefying airman, the decaying sow's head, swarming with flies). Many writers decide not to allow the atom bomb to remain as an ominous threat symbolically existing in the background of the book's world. Instead the full horror of nuclear annihilation is unleashed in the early stages of the book. Children's writers typically present shockingly frank and realistic descriptions of the likely aftermath of the bomb, literally portraying its 'hell-bright hues'²¹ in the opening scenes.

Le Guin has drawn attention to the inherent dangers of the post-holocaust scenario, which may be interpreted as a thrilling land of adventure which risks perpetrating what she calls 'the pornography of violence.'²² Obviously certain narrative problems immediately present themselves. The author needs a protagonist who must survive, at least long enough to tell his story and make the consequences of the devastation felt. Le Guin is concerned, however, that post-holocaust scenarios may perpetuate a false dream of the future, in which physical survival is deemed possible:

Those stories in which Life Goes On, even though two headed and faintly glowing in the dark, may be seen as false reassurance.²³

I believe that children's authors are extremely concerned that their admonitory purpose should not be misinterpreted by a naive (child) reader, and these anxieties are at their most extreme in the post-holocaust dystopian novel. It seems likely that children's novelists who decide to use the worst-case scenario feel compelled to heavily signal the utter horror of this unthinkable future from the very outset. Their warning is conducted on a more literal

²⁰Kaminski (1987) p.61

²¹Louise Lawrence *Children of the Dust* (London: Bodley Head, 1985 rpt. London:Fontana Lions, 1989)p.28

²²'Facing It' in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (London: Paladin, 1992) p.102

²³*ibid.* p.103

and immediately obvious level, rather than allowing the reader's sense of decline to steadily accumulate, as in Golding's novel. Thus it is common to find that books such as Brother in the Land²⁴The Last Children,²⁵ Wolf of Shadows²⁶ and Children of the Dust all concentrate initially upon the physical suffering of the victims of the blast in lurid and horrifying detail. Swindells, for example, structures his novel so that the teenager, Danny, encounters a nauseating sight in the first few pages:

He lay on his back with his mouth open. One side of his face was a mass of raw flesh. Great, puffy blisters clustered around the eye, reducing it to a slit... (p.14)

In The Last Children Roland similarly suffers the traumatic experience of seeing the fate of others

They looked awful: burned, maimed, blind ...I saw people with burns all over their bodies ...The meadows were full of corpses ... without skin, burned corpses.(p.22)

In Children of the Dust even the young narrator, Sarah, experiences the shocking symptoms herself: 'The sores spread on her face. Her gums bled. Her teeth came loose.' (p47) She ventures out from home in search of food, but the countryside has been destroyed, the once-idyllic farm is ironically no longer able to nourish her literally or spiritually

The stench was indescribable...blood and bones and the rotting remains of cattle, dung and sour milk...Rats attacked a sick cow chained in the milking parlour. (p49)

The force with which these passages convey the sickening reality seems designed to ensure that the reader immediately perceives the global catastrophe as an indisputably retrograde human action. In this way the children's dystopia commonly becomes committed to a narrative structure in which the stakes for the remnant population are deliberately heightened into a battle for literal survival from the outset. The immediate context of extreme scarcity risks compromising the moral meaning, however, for the biological laws of necessity may be used to evade the immoral aspects of human choices depicted in the novel. The novel's world physically favours the brute.

²⁴Robert Swindells (OUP, 1984. rpt. Harmondsworth:Puffin Plus, 1987)

²⁵ Gudrun Pausewang, (Ravensburg:Otto Maier, 1983. rpt. London: Walker, 1990, trans. N. Watt)

²⁶Whitley Streiber (Hodder and Stoughton, 1986)

Given the absolute dominance of this initial context, traditionally conceived ideals are predictably doomed. Many writers seek to underline the moral sphere by depicting the pathos of the sudden loss of childhood. The teenage narrators are rapidly forced to assume responsibilities which adults could not be expected to tolerate. Repeatedly we are shown the protagonists reflecting dejectedly upon the privileges childhood used to confer, which now seem depressingly remote and childish. Children's novels strike a sentimental tone as a result. Danny sentimentally remembers the carefree days spent playing on the moors, when food was merely a luxury, not a necessity, and he consumed ice-lollies and Coke. Roland recalls the (ironic) security and promise of the recent summer holidays, a time when he (misguidedly) trusted in the power of his parents to protect him. William, the young child in Lawrence's novel, still relies on the adults in his fallen world to sustain him, but his confidence is inevitably ironically betrayed. The carefree summer day, with 'cloudless blue skies...sunlight and flowers' has been exchanged for a living hell. In this new world no adult can save him, and he can only be helped to die as quickly and painlessly as possible.

To underscore the moral point child-protagonists are principally cast as disempowered victims. Unlike Golding's boys (who do not need to act as they do) they do not precipitate their own decline, and writers risk depicting a 'hopelessness foreclosing all action.'²⁷ Swindells, Streiber and Pausewang all unswervingly depict the deaths of the youngest, most vulnerable children to convey the full scale of the horror. In Brother in the Land Danny's frail brother ultimately dies of a 'creeping dose' and new babies are born, as they are in The Last Children, only to die of their horrific deformities. These narrative tactics are used to underline the urgency of the warning and to ensure that the reader responds with pitying disgust. In each text, then, it is abundantly clear that the former paradise of a rich and regenerative earth has been reduced into an inferno. The means of reproducing a new start in this future have literally been denied by the scale of the imagined catastrophe. Humanity will soon be literally extinct. 'Misanthropy is never far away,'²⁸ and the strength with which writers advocate the reader keeps the best qualities of human nature in view is often artistically damaging.

²⁷Kaminski (1987) p.65

²⁸Scutter (1992)

In Wolf of Shadows the loss of the earth is felt in non-human terms, perceived through the eyes of the surviving lone wolf. He seems designed to act as a means of implicating the reader into a sense of social responsibility. The wolf, not equipped with the human knowledge of what has caused the unbearable physical conditions that nuclear winter represents, fails to understand precisely what is happening. The readers, however, are patently able to supply the information that the wolf lacks, thus aligning themselves with the flawed species which has unleashed the calamity. Streiber provokes the reader to question our own nature and our homocentric way of seeing life. Wolf is, however, a sentimentalised, curiously 'human' character, capable of moral reflection, which is at odds with the surface 'message' to value non-human life.

In other texts human nuclear aggression has created an amoral, brutalised environment. A bleak view of human nature is used to warn about the undesirability of this future. Life in the newly polluted wreckage is reduced to a bitter struggle for literal survival. The imaginative context of extreme scarcity emphasises a dark view of the 'survival of the fittest', which is taken to mean the ability to put one's own needs before any other consideration. Morality and physical needs diverge and conflict. Writers struggle to direct readers to perceive the immoral nature of human behaviour. Some trust to irony to carry their moral meaning. In Brother in the Land for instance, an emergent military regime appears to help the sick and needy, but actually ironically disposes of them so that it can preserve the scarce food-stocks for itself. On a smaller scale in The Last Children neighbours unite to safeguard their own property, turning away children who have lost everything. This is made to seem plausible, and even to some extent excusable, when it is represented as a stark choice of biological necessity:

People have to be hard-hearted if they want to survive in such hard times ... What good is Christian charity if it kills you?

Swindells is fairly uncompromising in pursuing his narrative hypothesis. Even Danny, who is initially appalled by his father's selfish stock-piling of food for his own family when others are starving, eventually learns to see a corpse simply as a lucky opportunity to pillage a coat

or a hat. In Wolf of Shadows the child-survivors are similarly debased to the status of mere scavengers, who eat the remains of the wolf-pack's kill, '...blood running down their chins. They gagged and choked like displeased crows.' (p.55)

Children's writers often attempt to supply moral hope overtly within the text, however, choosing to directly articulate a moral alternative via their teenage heroes²⁹. Few fully play out the consequences of their initial predictions. Instead of implying a better way, they typically 'attempt to give dramatic weight to their values,' and often 'present a formulaic and abstract representation of opposites.'³⁰ Instead of reposing trust in the reader's ability to respond to the irony of these hugely undesirable scenarios, they attempt to identify the main teenage protagonist unequivocally with a saintly ideal, which is diametrically opposed to the bleakly ironic view of human nature. This often results in a spoilt story, with wooden and implausible characterisation. Given the warring context, the idealised characters seem dull and unattractive. As Kaminski observes, because the war story generally conceives peace as a 'lack'

There are few books which succeed in making peace [and the peace-lover] as exciting or viable as war. (p65)

Pausewang's Roland, for example, becomes less and less convincing as the narrative progresses. The story traces the appalling consequences of long-term survival, as life realistically gets worse rather than better. Pausewang depicts two groups of children, who represent two ways of coping with the intolerable situation. The first reacts bitterly and angrily, belligerently scrawling '*PARENTS BE DAMNED!*' vehemently across the broken walls of their former homes. Ultimately their ring-leader, the cripple, Andreas, can bear life no longer, and decides to kill himself. Given the imaginative context of violence, Andreas' self-violence seems psychologically convincing, even inevitable. In contrast the stoic endurance displayed by the saintly Roland seems naively conceived and improbable. He is too perfect. Paradoxically Pausewang has relied upon her ability to convince the reader of the plausibility of her future world, yet her depiction of a morally appealing human nature

²⁹See Brians (1990) p.136; Tolan (1986) p.361; Glazer (1986) p.87

³⁰Kaminski (1987) p.61

fails to convince. The writer has distorted experience by schematising it too rigidly. Roland's dedicated commitment to setting up and running a hospital, and finally a school is unconvincing. Unlike Golding, Pausewang has failed to adequately translate the abstract (her proposed solutions) into dramatic terms. Roland merely exists to act as a mouthpiece for the moral meaning. His final aspiration lack passion, being damagingly controlled instead by the author. He sets up a school dedicated to humane values, and urges

...they must want a life without looting, stealing, and killing. They must learn to respect each other again, and to give help where help is needed. They must learn to talk with each other and work together to find solutions to their problems, instead of immediately striking out at one another. They must feel responsible for each other. They must love each other.(p.122)

Pausewang employs an unwritten conclusion, possibly to imply the inevitability of moral defeat in this world,³¹ or possibly to evade facing the death of her moral protagonist.

Lawrence's Sarah is similarly unconvincing and improbably altruistic when set against the psychological realism of her step-mother's horrified despair. Swindells' Danny seems more human because he is less rigidly segregated from the other debased characters in the novel. Ultimately, however, Swindells rescues him from the need to express the aggression which seems inevitable in a world in which a new savage code is in the ascendancy: 'Cavemen versus gentlemen. Hardness versus compassion. No contest.' (p42)

Eventually Swindells provides a foil to throw Danny's 'hardness' into sharp relief. He depicts the moral degeneracy of the sadist, Charlie, who grins as he kills his victims needlessly, sadistically relishing the pathological expression of aggression. Pitted in conflict with Charlie, Danny must either fight or die, although implausibly Danny is not forced to make the choice when Charlie is killed by a rival gang which bursts onto the scene.

Many of the children's dystopias draw nearer to Golding's use of irony when they raise the possibility of an alternative, morally preferable community which, like Ralph's, is dedicated to sane principles. Swindells portrays a Christ-like figure, Branwell, who arrives on a

³¹Roland's words 'For these are the last children of Schevenborn' close the novel p.122

donkey and who preaches a reverence for life and nature. Like Ralph's, Branwell's commune also fails to recognise the need to fight, and is ultimately vulnerable and destroyed by the novel's hunters.

Streiber's novel draws upon the non-human idea of the wolf-pack to suggest an alternative, morally appealing means of social organisation, and to overtly indicate a need to redraw our conception of ourselves. The female scientist learns from the wolves, who throw dark human nature (represented by male hunters) into sharp relief:

Each of you is all of you - pack and species. And you know it, and take your love of one another from it. Before the war people became so separate from one another we were like leaves in the sea. We were alone. (p.110)

Despite the obtrusive arrangement of her narrative around these schematically conceived polar opposites, and the overtly didactic and wooden tone of the scientist's comments, Streiber is still reluctant to trust to the reader's intelligence to recognise the revised ideal. Ultimately Wolf is left searching for a warm valley in which to survive with his pack. The ending is left open. Hopeful signs exist: the ice begins to melt, suggesting that perhaps spring and regeneration are underway and the situation is improving. The preceding novel has however, made a pessimistic conclusion seem likely: the wolves have always been (and continue to be) helpless victims at the hands of human hunters. Streiber uses an 'Afterword' to explain the story's significance and tell a reader how to respond:

The bond that develops between the wolves and the human beings in the story is meant to suggest that we can find new ways of thinking about, and relating to, animals... I cannot say whether Wolf of Shadows ever finds his pack a warm valley ...The true end of the story comes when we decide, as a species, to dismantle the machine and use our great intelligence on behalf of the earth that bears us, rather than against her. (p.126)

Pausewang also concludes her book with an 'Epilogue,' which similarly displays her general unease with the dystopian novel for children. She fails to trust in her pessimistically ironic narrative, and instead pedantically spells out

Perhaps my story will encourage all of us to begin to resist the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It is still not too late!

At times even Swindells is unwilling to let the narrative unobtrusively carry the didacticism.

Unnecessarily intrusive authorial control can be seen in Branwell's explanation:

It's human nature... to plunder and kill. They have no reverence for life...They're practically pre-Neanderthal...Nature made them brutal because only brutes could survive in the harsh world that existed then. And when, thousands of years later, we began to develop weapons of mass-destruction, nature saw what was coming and began turning us back into brutes, so that we might survive in a devastated world. ..We watched death and destruction on T.V. newsreels till it meant nothing to us...If we'd realised what was happening to us, if we'd clung on to our reverence for life, then we'd never have launched those missiles. (p76)

Swindells explicitly makes the connections between the novel's future world and the present real world for the reader, rather than leaving these connections as gaps which the reader must fill. In short, he fails to trust to irony, which actively engages the reader in the construction of moral meaning. Whereas Golding's classic dystopia leaves the reader to infer the need for moral change, children's writers habitually supply it. Rational persuasion replaces Golding's invitation to the reader to reconstruct *implied* meanings by emotional, as well as intellectual engagement with the story.

This tendency to supply preferable moral meanings also seems to lead children's writers to compromise the ironic ending which the preceding narrative predicts. Streiber's 'Afterword' claims to place the responsibility for 'the end of the story' with the reader, aiming to encourage the reader to rewrite the social world in Higonnet's sense. Yet the suggestion that hope may be possible after all seems like a failure of nerve at the end of Wolf of Shadows. By consciously supplying the balancing hope that Wolf can find a warm valley, Streiber risks undermining the admonitory objective of his preceding text. The reader may well infer that the holocaust was no bad thing after all.

Alternatively, the reader may decide that hope is impossible for Wolf, as it probably is for Roland, and for Danny. It may be that the author's silence about the future of these youngsters 'reinforces the unspeakable horror'³² of their slow deaths, by forcing the reader to actively contemplate the possibility. But Danny is rewarded with a foretaste of sexual maturity as he finally departs the novel with his girlfriend, Kim, which seems designed to

³²Higonnet (1987) p.50

suggest a new start in a more traditional form of symbolic closure, in which the two represent Adam and Eve figures. If this is so, then I believe that probably readers will read against it. In each of these novels it is likely that the reader will perceive that human nature is so unalterably flawed that there is no viable means of avoiding the dire consequences presented here. The preceding narratives have systematically 'proved' that kindness leaves the individual physically vulnerable.

Few writers trust to a consistently ironic presentation to carry their didacticism. Staig's exciting thriller The Network³³ experimentally plays on the reader's expectations of an optimistic ending, in which three loners combine as companions to counteract evil. Early in the novel the realistic topography of London's underground system is gradually transformed into a psychological landscape of nightmare as an ancient prophecy struggles to be fulfilled. A psychotic peace-campaigner, believing that he is releasing a benign Earth-Mother to free the world from the seeds of nuclear destruction, instead ironically lets loose a malign power. Michael's magic symbols allow a diabolic force to become grotesquely 'human', merging flesh with the technology of the Underground's system.

Transformed into a polluted monster, the Tube seems to represent a surreal and ironic parody of its original function: it was designed to enable people to travel and to communicate with each other. In the past it has nurtured the weak and outcast, protecting people from air raids in the Second World War and providing a 'womb' for the teenage outsider, Spud, for whom, like Sills and George, it has always provided sanctuary. The narrative breathtakingly follows their attempts to restore normality and counteract Michael's diabolic magical symbols, by using an equally ancient, benign magic. Dancing against the circle, they appear ultimately to succeed in stopping the demonic forces from fully taking control of the Tube's 'brain', the computer which forms the nerve-centre of this modern technology.

In an ingeniously shocking finale, however, Staig suddenly reveals that the three 'heroes' have actually unwittingly succeeded in unleashing the nuclear arsenal which was secretly

³³Lawrence Staig (London: Collins, 1989)

housed within the Underground. In a striking violation of the conventions of adolescent literature, Staig unequivocally shows his brave and moral protagonists failing, and actually precipitating the devastation of the world. Too late, Spud realises that he, like the reader, has been confounded by 'technological lies' throughout the course of the whole novel. The apparently benign system of the Underground has actually disguised the reality: the system was built as a means of destruction and attack, not defence. Instead of a womb, it represents a tomb. The reader is likely to be thrown backwards into a re-reading of the technological symbols which throughout appeared to suggest an optimistic vision of human progress. But Staig has skilfully constructed his symbols so that, all along, they have been ambiguous, and actually equally capable of representing the ironic opposite, evil, negativity and inexorable decline. The diabolic evil is not 'out there' or 'other', but represents the heart of darkness embedded in mankind and its acquisitive, aggressive, solipsistic nature. Like Spud, the reader is calculated to complacently accept the optimistic interpretation, and the final overthrow of the optimistic expectations generated causes readers to actively question their own passively held assumptions, by looking for alternative, more cynical interpretations.

Why Weeps the Brogan³⁴ also initially appears to create an alternative fantasy future, in which Saxon and Gilbert experience a surreal existence, trapped within the choking dust of the British Museum, which is decaying horrifically. This too is a nightmare landscape, made worse by the fact that the two children do not appreciate what they have lost, when it gradually becomes obvious that nuclear war has been the cause of their frightening lifestyle. They stoically recreate their tightly bounded universe, reinventing their own explanations and stories, and surviving by adhering to a strict self-created ritual, which includes sweeping up the ever-encroaching dust and co-operating to fight back terrifying incursions of spiders. Worst of all, they are plagued by what they take to be a monster, the Brogan, which they placate by begrudgingly offering it food and drink.

Not until the very end of the novel does Scott reveal the awful truth of the Brogan's identity. The monster is the children's mother, who has suffered fearful injuries when trying to protect her children from the blast. Ironically her orders to 'Stay in there and don't come

³⁴Hugh Scott (London: Walker, 1989)

out' have, in one sense betrayed them, trapping them in a nightmare scenario of helpless horror. Their loathing of their speechless mother has also ironically driven *them* to betray *her*, and the shocking revelation shows the 'innocent' children to be monsters too. Their fear of the Brogan causes the children to allow their mother to slip to her death.

Eventually the children are 'rescued' by what they take to be an angel, who ominously descends from their 'Heaven'. The reader realises that this is simply a man in protective (radiation-proof?) clothing, but is likely to predict that the children's existence has been so distorted that they will be at a loss in the 'real' world, which, if not obliterated, will probably terrify them by its difference from their claustrophobic existence. More importantly, the notion of the mother as a literally broken savage who cannot protect her children, but ironically relied upon them for physical survival, and who inspired them with hatred and fear, not love, suggests, like Golding's ironic closure, that the wrecked adult world will not be able to provide a desirable refuge for these broken children. What follows is left to the reader's imagination.

Like Scott, most writers choose to repudiate any suggestion of the fantastic and are committed, especially in the initial stages of their novels, to convincing the reader that the novel presents a plausible, predictable scenario. Some books, like Children of the Dust and Taronga³⁵ clearly establish this extrapolatory frame of reference in their opening sections. Then, instead of depicting the predictable outcomes, they try to radically transform the narrative in the middle stages of the novel. In this way they attempt to present a structural transformation which seems designed to ensure that the reader recognises the need for positive moral action. They seek to supply the 'antidote' to the malaise they initially describe, rather than risk leaving the narrative to imply it, as Golding did. Kelleher and Lawrence both seek to overthrow the admonitory premises of holocaust writing once they have firmly established them, resorting instead in the latter half of the novel to techniques which more clearly resembles The Chrysalids, rather than Lord of the Flies. In broad terms they attempt to replace the stark pessimism of ironic probability (which predicts human extinction as a result of the species' morally flawed, violent nature) with the optimism of a

³⁵Victor Kelleher (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking Kestrel, 1986. Rpt. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988)

morally improved new species. I believe they are largely unsuccessful because they fail to overcome basic contradictions between these two narrative techniques. Humanity is initially 'realistically' portrayed as a morally flawed species which has proved itself culpable of the worst kind of aggressive behaviour, having wilfully unleashed the holocaust itself. This is presented as an unequivocally damaging, regressive action, which reduces mankind to exist at the level of the brute, often fighting for scarce resources in an inevitable decline towards extinction and loss.

The introduction of the idea that such humanity can suddenly literally evolve into a morally superior biological species then appears naively imagined and compromising: undermining the power of the preceding text. It suggests a lack of authorial trust both in the ability of the narrative to carry the didactic impulse and in the implied child-reader's ability to interpret the significance of the story. Both books are schematically presented in three sections. Each novel loses the subtle strengths of its first section: convincing characterisation breaks down; the plot becomes schematic and contrived; inherent ideological tensions arise which are either crudely and dismissively resolved, or appear as confusions which remain unaddressed and contradict other aspects of the narrative.

The schism is clearly evident in Children of the Dust. The admonitory force and emotional impact of Lawrence's first section wanes substantially as the firmly established sense of 'stark realism'³⁶ and irony give way to the techniques of fantasy and obtrusive didacticism in order to achieve an annexed optimistic ending. The effect is jarring: leaving the sense that naive wish-fulfilment replaces psychological veracity. In one generation Homo Sapiens is replaced by 'Homo Superior', a new evolutionary strain which 'maintained the continuity of creation.' (p168)

The unpredictability of this species' development is described as 'wonderful' and associated with 'memories of magic and myth' (p155). The mutants are creatures of fantasy, capable of seeing 'veils of ultraviolet light shining over a rainbow-coloured earth, auras of light around

³⁶Lenz (1990) p.153

all living things' and magically moving matter by means of psycho-kinetic energy.³⁷ They are not only more aptly equipped to physically survive, but are morally superior, their enhanced psychic abilities allowing them to co-operate and think collectively. The mutants are clearly intended to represent a metaphoric human change based upon moral adaptation.

They signify a potent world of ideas, fusing the oppositions inherent in the divisions of *Homo Sapiens*' nature. Laura explains: 'Ideas are enough. Ideas can become a philosophy and change the world.' (p.161)

The problem is, however, that Lawrence fails to translate abstract ideas into dramatic terms. The opening section of the novel succeeds because it clothes its ideas in concrete and convincing imagery, generating reader expectations which the later stages fail to fulfil as the realism is abandoned.

For example we see Simon, one of the last survivors of old, bunker society, initially repulsed by the white eyes and albino fur of the mutants, but at the end of the novel he learns to accept and respect his evolutionary 'cousins' because of the superior ideas in which they believe. Unlike Sarah, though, Simon is never successfully portrayed as a psychologically convincing character. He is solely represented by his ideological opinions, becoming a mere vehicle to voice much undisguised analysis of contemporary Western culture. The narrator reveals Simon's thoughts at the novel's close:

In the past the inability of people to reconcile themselves to each other's differences had led to confrontation, tyranny, subjugation and war. Not any more did Simon see the need for that. Diversity was necessary and natural, part of the evolutionary process. If the human race had accepted each others' differences instead of trying to oppose them... they might not have destroyed themselves. (p.165)

The writing conveys little sense of Simon's feelings and inner compulsions, only his objective reasoning. The detached tone typifies the latter stages of the book, throughout which characters are chiefly represented by lengthy chunks of dialogue ranged around their

³⁷Brians (1992) has objected to this portrayal, claiming 'magical solutions are no solutions at all....Pseudo-Darwinian optimism is entirely out of place' p.140. See also Lenz (1990)p.155, who believes the novel's use of radiation as a 'magic wand to transform humans into something more attractive' raises an ethical problem.

polarised ideological positions. The stilted and schematic effect of this technique contrasts starkly with the power of the opening. Lawrence's novel undergoes too abrupt a change of form. Moreover, her solution seems dangerously self-contradictory, seeing the nuclear holocaust first as an appalling atrocity, then later as 'no ultimate disaster'.³⁸

Victor Kelleher's Taronga is similarly schematically structured around three sections, entitled 'The Calling', 'The Trial' and 'The Answer'. As these headings suggest, the novel poses a problem, enacts a trial or temptation, and eventually supplies a solution. Kelleher, like Golding, repeatedly uses Biblical allusion and a Christian frame of reference to steadily and subtly construct reader-expectations. Gradually images of Eden and the Fall, knowledge, primal sin, choice, guilt, temptation, Doomsday and Judgement accumulate throughout the text. Once noticed, they are only capable of being interpreted in one way: like Golding's novel, the book re-enacts the Fall of Man, which pessimistically presents a view of human nature that is fundamentally flawed. Regression is imminent, physically and morally.

Kelleher portrays 'Last Days', a future in which, due to war and threatened nuclear hostilities, human systems world-wide are breaking down irreparably. Civilisation has crumbled, and Man is predicted to regress towards savagery, his worst nature prevailing. The action is set in Australia, where the natural environment has largely remained intact. The opening section is situated in the wilderness of the Bush, where we see individuals who have reverted to hunting and killing. Like Golding's boys, Kelleher's hunters exhibit sadistic pleasure in their killing. They, too, are not primarily governed by biological need, but by the will to exert force over weaker, vulnerable creatures. This self-indulgence replicates and warns against the warring human mentality which has insanely but inevitably destroyed its own world.

Thus the hunter, Greg, is wilfully aggressive by nature, misusing his technological power to abuse the natural world. Greg, like Jack, also significantly manipulates his fellow humans. He forces the teenager, Ben, to help him to hunt and kill, even when the prey is useless to

³⁸Despite the objections raised by Lenz and Brians, Crew (1988) p. 85 and Tolan (1986) p.361 both approve of Lawrence's solution, because it offers young readers hope.

him. Ben has the capacity to 'Call' animals telepathically, luring them into the range of Greg's rifle. When Ben eventually tries to save an inedible dingo from death at Greg's hands, he too is brutally clubbed: "'I'm like the dingo,' he thought in astonishment, 'the two of us...the same..'"(p7) Ben, like Piggy and Ralph, has become an animal to Greg, who can then hunt him mercilessly. Ben escapes Greg's brutal exploitation, but carries with him feelings of deep guilt: for he Called the dingo, thus causing its death.

The poise with which Kelleher systematically places Ben in repeated situations in which he resorts to Calling against his will steadily constructs the reader's view of the novel's concerns, as we try to make sense of the nature of Ben's power, its effects, and the reasons for his fears and repeated promises not to use it. The formalised patterning of the narrative here is unobtrusive and allows a satisfying sense of realism. Ben, fearing the power of his ability to Call, vows not to use it because 'it's too much like... Last Days' (p.10). He associates it with human aggression, which results in violence and brutal killing for no good reason other than selfish greed and sadistic pleasure, as exemplified by looted cars which were fleeing the city, their occupants murdered by gangs.

Last Days have reduced life to a savage struggle for survival in which the physically strong and ruthless are predicted to triumph by violent means. This is portrayed as a base savagery, a reduction to natural law which suggests the brute principles of the survival of the fittest. The writing is essentially admonitory, warning of the terrifying ease with which even the basically good-natured Ben resorts to violence against his will. Ben struggles against his worst nature: his human capacity for selfish aggression. He must try to live without harming others, human or animal.

The novel's world is such that Ben's altruism is predictably doomed. He is repeatedly placed in situations in which Calling and killing are his only means of literal survival. He uses his gift to make an attacker's horse shy, inadvertently breaking its leg and having to shoot it to end its suffering. Soon afterwards Ben hears

...the wordless response of a mind so defiant, so savagely distrustful and unforgiving, that he felt momentarily awed. And also strangely compelled, drawn by its mingled suggestion of danger and promise.(p.20)

It is the Call of Raja, a massive tiger imprisoned in, and used to guard, Taronga zoo in Sydney. Ben is attracted by the defiant raw savagery and wild power of the beast

In the brooding dusk it was more like an expression of sanity; the outpouring of a mind ...that would crush anything that stood in its way, but was yet balanced, confident of its strength and purpose. (p.36)

Raja appears to share his intense ferocity of will with humanity, but gradually Kelleher feels compelled to try to hold Man and beast increasingly separate, because his didactic solution relies upon their moral differences.

Ben travels towards the city to face his 'trial' with Raja in Taronga zoo. As he approaches the city he encounters lawless bands of violent men, and again reneges on his promise not to Call. He allows a dog to follow him because its keen senses will alert him to danger, but the reader is warned

Not for some days did he come to regret that decision and to realise that he had fallen into the same old trap again. (p.27)

On Sydney's outskirts Ben predictably has to choose between his own survival and that of the dog's. He Calls the dog to fend off his attackers. The dog dies and Ben's escape is bought at the expense of another guilty betrayal.

By the end of the first section it is clear that the narrative revolves around Ben's choice, and herein lies the novel's fundamental dilemma. In the established context, which is dominated by savagery and the violent laws of nature, Ben has no choice. This renders him largely incapable of embodying the problems and solutions that the novel explores. Kelleher attempts to make Ben a deeply plausible character who seems tragically trapped by his human nature, but who has the capacity for moral transformation, which Kelleher envisages in terms of a non-invasive, tolerant attitude towards non-human species, which Man must learn to respect and regard as equals. The novel juxtaposes the world of humans with

animals, showing the former to be culpable for killing 'for no good reason', whereas animals kill purely for survival, governed by biological need. Kelleher's dilemma is, however, that Ben is actually trapped by the logic of biological survival, deeply equated from the start with the animal-victims he sees himself betraying. Despite trying to act decently in a broken world, to survive in this violent context of perpetual conflict and aggression Ben needs to kill. He can only see this as a moral failing. Ben's altruism is doomed to fail when tested.

Kelleher faces the problem of maintaining human sympathy for the worthwhile struggle Ben undertakes, whilst pushing Ben through total disillusionment with humanity in order to achieve the solution of a larger optimistic frame of reference, a new evolutionary perspective which consciously devalues human life itself. In the final section Ben becomes the agent of change, using his ability to Call to free the imprisoned animals from the zoo, where they are regarded as mere possessions by bands of survivors who fight brutally for ownership of the zoo's resources. Taronga zoo becomes a potent metaphor for the human mentality which is only capable of the selfish exploitation of others. The groups fighting over Taronga are seen in starkly absolute terms, motivated by greed, power, jealousy and revenge. Predictably they destroy both the zoo and themselves, replicating Last Days. The overall vision of human nature is so unrelievedly bleak that their self-destruction becomes unequivocally desirable. The danger is that they will also destroy the environment and their animal victims.

Ben's trial in Taronga is, then, to learn from the only fully sympathetic character, the Aborigine, Ellie, that Taronga is no Eden as he supposed, but is the possession ironically causing human war. His trial seems twofold. Firstly he must control Raja, who guards the zoo from rival gangs, or be killed by Raja's avenging hatred of betraying humanity, whom Ben partially represents. Secondly, Ben must strip himself of his illusions of Taronga as Edenic, and reject it in horror, as he must reject humanity itself, because its existence means that Man habitually sets his own life above that of others. By the end of the 'Trial' section, Ben importantly decides to be the active agent enabling both fighting human groups to destroy each other.

Kelleher uses Ben to express the possibility of human change, and dramatises it by having Ben deeply altered physically. He is scarred by human gunfire, and with his healed face emerges a new consciousness and 'The Answer'. He allows the destruction of Taronga, and Calls the animals to freedom in the Bush. Thus he no longer sets himself above animals, imposing his will upon them, but, like Ellie, treats them as equals. The effect is oddly nostalgic and naive, however, because Ben is made to promise not to use his ability to Call, even though without it he would have been powerless to help the animals. Human power has become so deeply associated with sin in the established pessimistic context of the Fall, that Kelleher feels it is safer to absolutely deny Ben's radical, empowering vision, rather than allow its responsible use. Ben cannot be trusted to moral self-regulation, for his human nature has already been too heavily stigmatised. Kelleher chooses instead to disinvent humanity's technological capacity and recover an apparently idyllic, Aboriginal past. The novel ends as Ellie and Ben optimistically journey into the Bush to begin a new evolutionary future, a symbolic closure in which they become a new Adam and Eve able to live humbly on equal terms with the freed animals.

In order to secure this didactic conclusion and a revised conception of the human animal, however, Kelleher increasingly intrudes upon the writing, puncturing the psychological realism. The plotting gradually becomes too reliant upon unlikely coincidence and events become contrived, and the characters become schematically conceived as polar opposites. For instance, Raja, who initially is capable of carrying his representative load because he also functions successfully within the realistic form as a plausible savage animal, later becomes a symbol at the expense of his credibility as tiger. He increasingly is made to assume human characteristics so as to implausibly return to avenge himself upon humanity by killing the warring gang-leaders in the zoo, and to judge the changed Ben and offer him forgiveness for his former betrayals of animals. Kelleher's 'answer' is located in essentially human terms - in the language of Christian redemption and humility established by his story of Man's Fall- but this is fundamentally at odds with the principles of biological need demanded by the framework of evolutionary speculation, for natural law has no concept of forgiveness. The contradictions cause Kelleher to present the tiger in a curiously anthropomorphic way as he fails to act with the immediacy of a wild animal, the

uncalculating spontaneity and richness of which is purportedly being celebrated by the evolutionary solution.

Kelleher's didactic aim is clearly to insist that humanity stops thinking anthropocentrically, but his narrative technique is not consistent with his desire to point to a hopeful way forward. This is chiefly because he has firmly established a realistic, absolute, bleak vision of flawed human nature along Golding's lines in order to warn, which creates a predictive context in which it appears that humanity will be incapable of conscious moral change, because it cannot escape its own biological nature. Essentially the stark realism of the post-holocaust form presents the author with insurmountable problems to realise his ambitions, because its inherent logic resists a morally ambiguous portrayal of human nature.

In my view R C O'Brien's Z For Zachariah³⁹ is unique in its ability to convincingly portray life after large scale nuclear war whilst maintaining the capacity to resist the pessimistic implications that I have been arguing this narrative form generally risks. As far as one can tell, I believe O'Brien has systematically constructed his text so as to deliberately encourage interpretative ambiguity and in so doing he offers a huge spectrum of possible readings. These range between two extreme interpretations. One, which I will call the probable reading, is as bleakly uncompromising as any of the extrapolatory texts studied in this chapter. It similarly unflinchingly predicts that human aggression is likely, in the future, to result in a bitter struggle for resources, which means that the strongest, most ruthless individuals will survive. This heavily ironic reading relies, like Golding's novel, upon creating a vision of biologically flawed human nature, which then renders moral virtues, such as peaceful co-operation, selflessness and communication apparently unreal. Instead they are replaced by war, self-interest and a breakdown of mutual understanding, which seem conditions of an evolutionary law founded upon the principles of competition.

But this is certainly not the only available reading. I believe that there is a preferred reading which the author hopes to promote. This preferred reading requires a relatively sophisticated reader-response, because it is based upon an ability to actively practise a

³⁹(London: Victor Gollancz, 1975. rpt. London: Fontana Lions, 1985)

radical way of thinking and imagining that can largely only remain implied by the other children's texts I have considered. The novel's strength is that the didactic intention is entirely at one with the narrative form. At best, the medium is the message, and Z For Zachariah demands a radical reader who can adapt to appreciate both sides of the conflict which fuels the novel's dramatic interest. The preferred reading shows rather than tells: importantly assuming that co-operation, tolerance, communication and the ability to consider the point of view of others are feasible options for a hopeful human future, however seriously they seem to be under threat. I will attempt to demonstrate the remarkable complexity of O'Brien's narrative strategy by focusing upon two extreme readings, based upon the sole protagonists, Ann and Loomis.

Like Golding, O'Brien scales down the stage upon which his drama is enacted. Following global nuclear destruction, a girl in her early teens, Ann Burden, is left alone in the valley her family has been farming for countless generations. As the world disintegrates into the wasteland of war, the valley remains as a source of plenty for Ann, miraculously preserved from the fall-out because of its isolated weather-patterns. Ann applies herself to tending the valley, partly through the need to become self-sufficient in the future when the stocks will run out; partly because she naturally has a close affinity with the land and its animals; and partly to shut out the loneliness and horror of having been deserted by her family and having heard the desperate, maddened anguish of the doomed survivors outside the valley as the last radio broadcasts finally closed down. She turns to her diary to provide the comfort of companionship and routine, and her record of events, plans, fears and dreams entirely forms the first-person narrative.

Ann is half excited, half fearful when a stranger enters the valley from the wasteland beyond. She watches him from afar, too timid to approach because, as she says, '...when you are alone then the whole idea changes'. (p.9) The man has survived because he has on a safe-suit protecting him against radiation. After cautiously testing the valley with a Geiger-counter, he joyfully throws off the suit and impetuously plunges into the polluted Burden Creek, whose source lies outside the valley. Ann, feeling guilty that she failed to warn him of its danger, nurses the sick man slowly back to health. Rambling in his fever, Loomis

reveals that he, too, has a guilty secret, believing himself responsible for the death of another man, Edward, who tried to take the safe-suit, the only one of its kind, from the research laboratory in which Loomis and he were scientists working on materials to protect soldiers from fall-out. As he recovers, his relationship with Ann deteriorates and he fails to provide the security, friendship and human warmth she romantically craves. She increasingly fears his motives, becoming convinced that he intends to take ownership of 'her' valley and make her his 'slave'. Eventually, after Loomis enters her bedroom at night, she panics, fleeing the house to live in hiding in a cave.

Loomis uses Faro, Ann's dog, to hunt her down and tries to force her return by locking up the stores, thus preventing her access to the supplies upon which she depends. Ann evades capture and continues to try to act as caretaker to the farmland, but is finally driven out when Loomis shoots at her. She resolves to steal the safe-suit and venture out of the valley and into the desolate waste in search of a better home. The book ends as Ann departs to search for the place of her dreams, a schoolroom in which she can fulfil her pre-war ambition to be an English teacher. Loomis watches helplessly as the girl leaves. The two are probably the last of their kind, the only hope of the biological futurity of their species, yet they cannot remain together. It seems that the human urge to compete overrides and negates the need to reproduce and regenerate. Ironically, like Golding's narrative, the book's events seem to re-enact in miniature the circumstances that precipitated the global self-slaughter responsible for the catastrophe.

Like Lord of the Flies, the novel can be read as a fable predicting human decline and extinction unless a radical change in human nature itself occurs, and soon. The extreme probable reading sees Loomis and Ann as polar opposites representing mutually exclusive values-systems which are evident today, in the pre-war world of the book's past. Once such expectations are generated it becomes possible to load the characters with appropriate significance. Loomis is male; adult; a rational, utilitarian scientist; physically and technologically powerful; a practical realist. Ann is female; a child; associated with poetry and Nature, instinct and nurture; is physically and technologically weak; an idealistic dreamer. The reader who interprets purely in terms of mutually exclusive absolutes will

predict conflict, and the novel's interest is maintained by the outcome of the struggle for the valley, which either character may 'win'. This reader is likely to predict that Loomis is physically best-adapted to succeed in competition for the valley's resources, although he is less deserving than Ann in moral terms. In other words, the probable reading pessimistically predicts, like Golding, that human nature is such that moral improvement is desirable but unlikely, because the laws of evolution mean that the fittest (which in this case is taken to mean the strongest, most aggressive) will necessarily triumph.⁴⁰

This reader may, for example, consider Loomis to represent absolute evil in contrast with Ann, whose claims to the valley seem morally justifiable. She originally 'owns' the valley, she tends it with respect and sympathy, her privacy is invaded and violated by the outsider. The fact that she is child and female may prompt the reader to see her as an innocent victim. Furthermore, her reverence for literature and prayer (which Loomis sees as a luxury they can ill afford) may represent a creativity and idealism that Loomis threatens to destroy. This extreme reading is concurrent with a re-enactment of the Fall, and is supported by the Biblical allusions. Viewed thus, the loss of the valley seems probable. Loomis is the last man, ironically a parody of Adam, the first man on earth. Ann may represent a Christ-figure, cast out and hungering in the wilderness, positing a peaceful and tolerant lifestyle. She may be seen as a saintly believer in a godless and forsaken world. Her prayers are seldom answered, and symbols of her prayer (some baby birds - significantly crows) fall rather than ascend; good or ill fortune seems to occur randomly, whether Ann remembers to pray or not.

On this level Loomis becomes the threat, the serpent in Ann's Eden. He may stand for violence (making protective clothing to enable soldiers to fight on in radiated areas; he carries and will use a gun against a defenceless girl, regressing to the status of hunter, like Jack). Loomis rules cruelly with a cane, like Pharaoh. He is a probable murderer, even a Cain-figure, for Edward may have been his brother. He may be seen as an ironic father figure who abuses his adult responsibility toward Ann, even to the extent of attempted rape.

⁴⁰I have repeatedly conducted small-scale investigations with undergraduate readers at the University of York, which have consistently shown that adults respond in this way, when reading on a teenager's behalf.

His intrusive presence dooms Ann's idealised dreams of a marriage of opposites, ruthlessly stealing her rightful inheritance and driving her out into the desolate waste. The suggestions are rich, and, as in Golding's novel, are all consistently able to convey a dark, ironic mood which means that loss and deterioration seem logically predictable.

A comparison with the apocalyptic Book of Zechariah⁴¹ is illuminating, which tells of the people's refusal to listen to the word of the Lord: 'Administer true justice, show loyalty and compassion to one another, do not oppress the orphan..., do not contrive evil against one another..' (Ch. 7 v. 8). As a result 'they made their pleasant land a waste', and God's judgement strikingly resembles the victims of nuclear war:

...their flesh shall rot while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall rot in their sockets, and their tongues shall rot in their mouths. (Ch. 14 v.12)

O'Brien's text clearly has a similar warning function, portrayed so vigorously that compromise between Ann and Loomis seems increasingly unlikely,⁴² although importantly it is never impossible.

But the Book of Zechariah also proclaims a new age of salvation, heralded by the building of the temple in the newly cleansed world. Ann may be seen as the survivor whom the Lord blesses:

Even if it may seem impossible to the survivors of this nation on that day.../...I will rescue my people.../...the vine shall yield its fruit and the soil its produce. (Ch.8, v.6/7/12)

Hope for the future is emphasised although the signs were disappointing. Thus when Ann finally leaves the valley she hopes to find other survivors, and although these may be seen as silly dreams, and the reader may predict her death, similar miracles have already happened.

⁴¹The New English Bible: standard edition with the Apocrypha (Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press 1970)

⁴²To the extent that one reviewer has written 'tragedy would have been a more natural end...for a book so cold and searching. Ann is diminished by the ending. Her escape is too easy, Loomis's reaction to it too much at variance with his inexorable..pressure on her spirit' Growing Point13, No.8 (1974)

Both Loomis and Faro have survived outside. Despite all, hope for the future is not inconsistent with the preceding text.

It is possible, however, that Loomis represents a hopeful figure in the Book of Zechariah. He may be Zerubbabel, the temple builder who redeems the blighted land. Loomis proves himself a rebuilder: he restarts the tractor and builds a generator. Zerubbabel was a civil governor, a ruler jointly crowned with Joshua, uniting civic and priestly lines. Perhaps the joining of Loomis and Ann may similarly occur in the future. Ann's return is suggested: she looks back to see Loomis pointing her towards birds circling in the distance. This may signify not only that life still exists, but that Loomis is capable of selfless action after all.

It is all a matter of how the facts are interpreted. This is as true for the reader as it is for the characters in the novel. The writing's rich complexity always suggests a range of interpretative possibilities. The effect is that the fact is never as simple as it may at first appear. O'Brien repeatedly encourages the reader to perceive this by showing us Ann's constant uncertainty. Her diary voices her perpetual state of confusion ('I am both excited and afraid' (p.8); 'I cannot be sure.'(p.18) 'I have to decide what to do.' (p.17) 'I know he is sick, but I do not know how sick, therefore I do not know what to do.' (p.39)). Whilst she contemplates Loomis' possible justification for killing Edward, she realises 'It all depends..' on the circumstances and what Edward was like, but these are facts we shall objectively never know. She can only ever have access to Loomis' version of events, and we must remember that we only have access to Ann's interpretation in her diary.

Ann may not always be aware of the full implications of her observations, or at least, it is possible to create a larger picture from her suggestions than the one she herself perceives. I believe O'Brien's preferred reader is one who is capable of seeing Ann from a sympathetic yet ironic distance, as a child who cannot understand everything she sees, as an observer who has not yet learnt to be a full participant, as an idealist whose naive wishes seem out of place when brought up against the struggle that existence has necessarily become.

Loomis, as well as Ann, may be a victim, rather than a villain.⁴³ He has witnessed the sorts of horrors that so distressed Ann's family, he appreciates and speaks poignantly of the human need to keep on hoping when all the evidence suggests that you are the last person on earth and all your loved ones are dead. He is obviously overjoyed to find the valley, and has something Ann describes as 'poetic' in his appearance. He may well misinterpret her childish behaviour, clumsily mistaking her sympathy for sexual advance, and her fear for antagonism and threatening competition. He is clearly a solitary figure, unused to children and female company. He may act, as he believes, in Ann's best interest when he tries to force her to stay with him. It may be that he never intends to rape her, but ironically sees the biological need to actualise her naive dreams of motherhood. He may be too deeply embarrassed to talk to the child about their necessary sexual union, or has misconstrued her friendliness, believing her to be ready and willing for something she is not. The 'attempted rape'⁴⁴ scene, in which Loomis creeps into Ann's bedroom at night, is important, because the reader needs to supply the sexual knowledge to read this interpretation into the text. Ann simply says she fears for her safety and her freedom. Any sexual implications are supplied by the reader: so the reading is there only for readers who are ready to see it. The whole text works in this way,⁴⁵ displaying a deep sensitivity to a child-audience. The mode of telling protects children from knowledge for which they are not prepared.

Loomis is an ominous figure mainly at Ann's suggestion. The book opens forbiddingly with 'Someone is coming. I am afraid.' But the allusions I discussed earlier are all capable of supporting a reading which sympathises with Loomis. He can be read as a pitiful ironic figure: the last man who would prefer to emulate Adam as a founding father, but whose hopes seem futile. Loomis may have used science to preserve, not extinguish life by making protective clothing. He may, like Ann, be motivated by fear in his desperate attempts to keep the suit, his only lifeline. His cold, rational will may be Ann's misinterpretation. The diary offers us the imaginative possibility that Edward did not die, despite the bullet-hole in the suit. Even if Loomis did kill Edward, circumstances may have explained, if not fully justified, his action. Loomis' instinct for self-preservation resembles Ann's: when she

⁴³For a sympathetic reading of Loomis see Brian Morse (1983) p.34

⁴⁴Crew (1988) p.85

⁴⁵Jill Paton Walsh (1977) believes Hoban's dark tale The Mouse and His Child will similarly shelter the young and innocent, who will not read beyond the surface of the fantasy.

believes herself threatened she, too, will take up arms, even being prepared to betray and kill Faro to save herself. Ann is every bit as possessive and territorial as the male. Loomis' attempts to 'trap' Ann may simply be the actions of a desperate man trying to ensure that this last chance to preserve the species is not wasted.

This reader may still conclude that a lack of common understanding will cause eventual breakdown between the two characters, but the emphasis is upon the reader's sympathy and tolerance, rather than the evocation of disgust, misanthropy and the attachment of guilt. The text works to provoke a deeper understanding of the motives of others.⁴⁶ In this way the text is ideologically open-ended: the reader is invited to question *both* ideologies, not simply being asked to reject one. For this reader hope is rooted in the imaginative possibility that Loomis and Ann may similarly change, becoming capable of seeing each others' point of view. I have already indicated that O'Brien leaves signs that this may happen.⁴⁷ This hope, then, lies in a purely moral evolution, and the complexity of O'Brien's narrative form means that this is not *necessarily* forced to conflict with the text's readings of biological evolution. It is likely, however, that the probable reading is the one most commonly adopted, prompted by an ironic-predictive, rather than a speculative reading strategy.⁴⁸ Although I believe O'Brien surmounts the inherent problems of predictive realism for a young readership, his particular accomplishment frequently remains unacknowledged and unexplained.⁴⁹

The next chapter will examine the very few texts which take a radically different narrative approach to the use of future fictional time. Its features are markedly speculative rather than predictive. Instead of pitting the individual against society, these texts see man in relation to (but not set against) the natural environment. For the children's writer this approach, I will

⁴⁶Morse (1983) observes that O'Brien's 'work is saturated with a sense of the horrors that man can inflict upon man, and obversely the beauty there can be in human nature' p.30

⁴⁷James Henke 'Growing up as Epic Adventure: the Biblical Collage in *Z for Zachariah*' *CLE* 13, No.2, (1982) has discovered that young readers often feel that Ann will find her new valley and a better life, which he suggests may be due in part to the optimistic Biblical allusions in the novel p.88.

⁴⁸Wehemeyer (1981) observes 'to the reader there appears no reason to hope' p.143

⁴⁹Botten (1983) sees the novel as a 'conflict between human values and scientific control which is better posited than illuminated by an ultimately homicidal scientist' p.228. Hoffman asserts the novel is a 'work of protest' and shows that 'survival is a non-concept' p.171.

argue, does not so obviously create the acute internal tensions and confusions of the ironic dystopian modes of telling I have examined so far.

CHAPTER 5

**NEW ANGLES OF PERCEPTION IN THE AMBIGUOUS UTOPIA:
ADOPTING THE NARRATIVE TACTICS OF A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA**

In former chapters I have established the preponderance of the dystopian novel, in which writers choose to pit the individual against society as their key narrative tactic. They tend to present futures 'which could have been prevented.'¹ These narratives are arranged to warn young readers, encouraging them to question and reject what writers appear to believe may be generally unexamined, passively held assumptions.² The questions they seek to raise concern the moral nature of society, political organisation and, at deeper imaginative levels, human nature itself. The dystopian novel, then, is a vehicle by which to challenge and attack particular ideologies, the 'cautionary tale'³ depicting their undesirable outcomes realistically in future time.

I have suggested, however, that once this ironic context has been firmly established, writers for the young then frequently hope to supply the possibility of something better in moral terms within the narrative structure itself, rather than being content to allow alternatives to remain implicit and in the hands of the reader. At a surface level, they 'are far more likely to end in an improved or improving situation than one which is deteriorating.'⁴ To some degree I believe many of the books attempt to raise the imaginative possibility of alternative evolutions, in which moral maturity and physical development do not necessarily diverge. In other words, they attempt to use the fluidity of future fictional time to speculate about morally preferable lines of future development, to show that hope lies in humanity's ability to retrace its evolutionary steps to the point at which things began to go wrong. Writers experiment with different ways of expressing change throughout the literature to underscore the point that for the young reader it is not too late. Often they seek to imaginatively redraw our perception of human nature itself and use this to allow a new form of heroism or idealism to emerge within their stories.

I believe writers pose themselves an immense tactical dilemma by choosing prophetic forms of story which emphasise prediction and plausibility. The predictive strategy makes it

¹Wehemeyer (1981) p.26

²See Ann Swinfen *In Defence of Fantasy* (London:Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) p.190, who believes the dystopia serves this objective.

³Stephens (1992) p.126

⁴Wehemeyer (1981) p.25

exceptionally difficult to make a hopeful reading available in the text, and damaging inconsistencies arise, which frequently suggest a disjunction between the didactic intention and the literary form.⁵ Frequently writers look to the techniques of fantasy to try to overcome these problems, introducing the marvellous (often telepathy, or a 'higher' magical power) to resolve, or at least alleviate, future problems, by suggesting alternative idealisms.

Swinfen regards the minimal use of the marvellous as being characteristic of dystopian fantasies, because they tend to focus upon social and political idealisms, which

...are idealisms of this world. In order to remain relevant to the contemporary reader within the framework of his daily life, works in this genre may not stray too far from primary reality. The use of the marvellous tends to be strictly limited.⁶

Indeed, commentary on predominantly dystopian futuristic fantasies often regards any use of the marvellous as frivolous and escapist, a damaging and unrestrained lapse from the rational, plausible emphasis of stark realism extrapolated into future time.⁷

MacLeod's⁸ objections to L'Engle's 'other world' fantasy adventure, A Wind in the Door, are primarily based upon these grounds. MacLeod recognises that L'Engle's fantasy observes the well-established conventions of a marvellous journey to another world, as used, for example by C S Lewis in his Narnia books. She complains, however, that L'Engle has used her novel's present time to raise serious social questions, by presenting mindlessness, violence, irrationality, hate and war in the real world. The frame narrative shows real children living in a contemporary society rife with tension and trouble: vandalism, unloving families, bullying at the hands of children and, worse, uncaring teachers. All these factors combine to make the child, Charles Wallace, literally and metaphorically sick. 'Yet the solutions, when they come, are neither reasoned nor rational,' complains MacLeod.

The story spins away from the actual world, with all its ugly, stubborn problems, into fantasy far too fantastic by far to have any usable connection with reality. (p.101)

⁵Brians (1992) notes that post-nuclear texts often contradict their main objective: to caution against allowing the Bomb to be used at all. p.137

⁶op.cit. p.190

⁷See, for example, the critical objections to the resolution of The Weathermonger, cited in Chapter 2.

⁸Ann Scott MacLeod 'Undercurrents: Pessimism in Contemporary Children's Fiction', CLE 21 (Summer 1976) pp.96-102.

L'Engle solves the generic problem of evil by depicting a struggle between 'higher' forces of good and evil, and predictably Charles is 'cured'. MacLeod views this as a naive and simplistic resolution which wrenches the discussion away from the terms of the real world, and which counters 'irrational evil' with 'a good quite as irrational...' (p.101). For MacLeod this mystical solution to real problems is deeply dissatisfying and evasive.⁹ Her objections seem to focus upon the implausibility of the marvellous, in which absolute moral solutions are offered to the intractable and complex nature of the social questions raised.

Rosemary Harris's A Quest for Orion¹⁰ and its sequel Tower of the Stars¹¹ also finally resolve the huge social and political questions she has raised by resorting to a mystical battle which is waged between higher supernatural forces which use the teenage protagonists as mere vehicles to channel their mysterious power. The story is a basically simple conflict between the forces of light and dark, which are clearly polarised throughout. Neo-Stalinist 'Freaks' have overthrown Europe in the dystopian near-future, enforcing a political regime of fear and deprivation which is clearly inhumane and repressive. The teenagers unite to become would-be rebels, who seek primarily to escape, but hopefully to stage a counter-revolution against Freak city, which currently dominates life. The narrative follows their desperate quest to penetrate the city. The youngsters are guided by their belief in traditional tales of former heroes, Cromwell, Charlemagne and Arthur, all of whom they believe fought for justice and liberty.

As the story progresses, however, it becomes clear that the children are, physically speaking, unlikely heroes, particularly when their main idol is Orion 'mighty hunter beneath the stars.' The Freaks' physical domination is unshakeable, and the teenagers are hopelessly equipped for combat. Their leader is the physically enfeebled spastic child, Alastair. He is extraordinarily sensitive, and seems unfit for physical survival in this now-brutal world of extreme scarcity. Protected by the others he eventually escapes to the countryside, where it gradually becomes evident that he is the new hero that Europe awaits in its hour of need.

⁹See also Bacon (1977) p.130

¹⁰(London: Faber, 1978 Rpt. 1980)

¹¹(London: Faber, 1980)

Harris attempts to identify Alastair not with the 'old' type of mighty hero, but with a radical new vision. Instead of a hunter, Alastair is clearly a saint, who, it seems, will be prepared to die in order to save his friends. When he is inevitably captured by the Freaks, Harris protects him from physical harm with Charlemagne's Talisman. He is magically able to 'hear' the voice of his dead friend, Wolf, who urges him to face the totalitarian forces with courage. As in 1984 Alastair faces torture, but, unlike Winston, is not made to relinquish his sense of identity, despite his frailty. Harris is clearly keen that his capacity to 'see things differently' and to maintain hope in the future is perceived as being commensurate with moral fortitude.

But, like L'Engle's Wind in the Door, the children's insight into the need for courage, co-operation and endurance, and their ability to adapt to the set of limiting circumstances in which they are placed is not, ultimately, the mainspring of the novel's optimistic resolution. The Freaks are successfully overthrown, and the children play a part in the rebellion. But in the end the youngsters are mystically saved by higher forces. Alastair is a mere pawn in a greater game:

...he was caught up into awareness of some other state of existence, where..things..were seen and spoken on [a] high level.' (p.171 Tower)

Alastair is urged ultimately to adopt blind faith, not reasoning, intelligent insight.

Never mind if you understand or not, so long as you act as you're told. (p.216, Tower)

In order to secure a successful outcome for these children, Harris has her story spin off into the drastically different perspective of fantasy. Strange hooded figures appear along Britain's leylines, lightning strikes and the Freaks' City is inexplicably subject to 'strange destruction' (p.256). Unquestioning 'evil' has been overthrown by an equally unquestioning and absolute 'good.' Harris's metaphor fails to bridge the distance between the real experience of the Freaks' totalitarian regime, and the symbolic experience. The gulf between the fears which predominate in the dystopian part of the novel, expressing the author's

apprehension about the realities of the contemporary world, and the affirmation she offers in the fantasy resolution is too great. As MacLeod observes of L'Engle's use of the fantastic

The solution to the generic problem of evil is at once too simplistic...and too remote from the forms of evil touched on in the realistic portions of the book. (p.101)

The dystopian narrative urges that the absolute solution is hugely undesirable, and when fantasy is used to strictly segregate good from evil the reader may well infer that moral regulation cannot emanate from within humanity, but needs to be externally imposed. This 'message' runs counter to the principle warning of the evils of totalitarian rule and the author risks a damaging disjunction between her literary design and her didactic intention.

On a lesser scale the same is true of MacDonald's more recent The Lake at the End of the World,¹² which portrays a plausible near-future scenario in which ecological collapse has brought about humanity's timely demise from its self-appointed position of power over the natural world. The book clearly seeks to promote a discussion of environmental issues, and does so by depicting the moral deficiencies of the two ways in which humanity seeks to rebuild itself in the imaginary new future.

Life is newly austere, so that in some sense the loss of technology is presented as the 'price' paid: a deprivation to be suffered. One band of survivors isolates itself in a rational, unnatural underground bunker society. The other maintains the basic family structure above-ground and may seem preferable, dedicated to living better with less. But clearly neither is ideal. 'Bunker life'¹³ is colourless and stultifying, family life becomes a 'war of love' and jealousy.

Eventually, and almost inevitably, given the heavily dystopic elements upon which the fiction is based, the bunker society blindly repeats humanity's past mistakes which precipitated the original disaster. The new society dedicates itself to restoring technological supremacy and harnessing the powers of the natural world to its own materialistic ends. The

¹²(London: MacDonald, 1989)

¹³Stephens (1992) p.128

underground social order eventually becomes a threat to the alternative lifestyle of the family and to the valley they all inhabit, but the conflict between the two groups, which the peaceable family would be powerless to win by physical force, is ultimately resolved by the lake, which exerts its own will and floods the underground caves in apparent retribution against the selfish inhabitants.

This is clearly intended to suggest the restoration of a new balance or equilibrium. It mirrors a story told by Evan, a scientist who studies conservation. In the book's world he is the only person who understands what has happened in the past, and is able to trace the original decline of the human species to its desire to control, not adapt to, the natural world. He sees the present world as a 'happy ending' to this story within the story. The main plot ends happily too: Nature itself symbolically 'triumphs' in yet another conflict with humanity, and the few survivors are those individuals who seem most capable of adapting to, rather than imposing their desires on, the environment.

The use of a fantastic device, the lake's ability to respond wilfully to human action, may conversely suggest that humans inevitably do not inherently possess the moral qualities needed to live in equilibrium, however, and have to be forced to comply by a nature with which 'human nature' is predicted to be interminably in conflict. In other words, the use of the marvellous may counteract the surface 'message' that we must learn to see ourselves as a part of nature, by suggesting that humans are incapable of doing so. If this view of human nature is inferred then the fantastic solution is, like L'Engle's, unequal to the problems the book presents, and the intended optimism of the resolution is likely to be outweighed by the pessimistic terms of the dystopia, even if these are expressed as an accumulated impression rather than an articulated position.

Kelleher's most recent novel, Parkland¹⁴, is a predominantly dystopian novel, which envisages the human species living in a future prison under the repressive control of its 'Keepers'. This is clearly a cautionary tale in which humans are made to suffer the indignities they currently heap upon their fellow creatures. Parkland is a zoo, in which humans are

¹⁴ Victor Kelleher. (Ringwood: Viking Children's Books, 1995)

now seen as animals, to whom anything can be done. They are bored and resentful of the experiments that are carried out upon them. By pitting man against the newly superior alien species (which have invaded human bodies, so that at first the reader is unaware that the Keepers are not human) as his key narrative tactic, Kelleher focuses upon questions of freedom and authority which are embedded in terms of social and political organisation. The teenage protagonists attempt to escape Parkland, ultimately to discover that their apparently human keepers are in fact a terrifying alien species which is designed to maintain the balance of the universe by brutally containing any species which threatens to corrupt the natural order.

Collective humanity is clearly deserving of such retribution, having perpetrated similar crimes on other species. It is simply getting a taste of its own medicine. But the reader is admitted into the interior experience of the teenage protagonist who suffers as a result. The alien species is only able to perceive human behaviour from a distance and thereby assumes a fatalistic view of man's nature. It cannot appreciate the rich diversity within the species, and its readiness to exterminate humanity is likely to make the reader believe that it is a monster, which must be defeated. Like Christopher's Tripods Trilogy, the story ultimately follows the successful overthrow of the alien species as a fantastic monster, which loses Kelleher's original focus upon the perils of an overweening sense of human importance in the natural world. Similar problems are raised, and resolutions sought in Westall's Urn Burial¹⁵, in which cats have evolved into a superior species, and in Norton's Iron Cage,¹⁶ in which aliens practise vivisection on humans, throwing man's misuse of power into sharp relief.

Some novelists use the fantastic device of telepathy to represent a new kind of consciousness, much like Harris's Alastair possessed. This may be used to confer the teenage protagonists with a physical advantage, so that, unlike Alastair, they are not viewed as victims, but as active agents of control. But when introduced into the predominantly dystopian novel, the author risks an ironic reading of this power. The reader may well connect power with corruption, and infer that today's rebel will be tomorrow's tyrant.

¹⁵ Robert Westall (Harmondsworth: Viking Kestrel, 1987)

¹⁶ Andre Norton (New York: Viking, 1974)

In The Glimpses, for example, Staig presents teenagers who are able to 'glimpse' into the biological structures of living creatures. Although 'glimpsing' uses the marvellous to express a form of heightened perception and empowers the children so that they do not appear to be cast as the vulnerable victims of the dystopian tradition, Staig's narrative (like that of Kelleher's Taronga) is based upon political conflict. It is gradually revealed that the Helix Party is using new scientific understandings of the make-up of the human mind to subliminally brainwash the populace to accept an evil totalitarian leadership. Initially the children seem to represent the hope that the Party's secrets will be publicly exposed and collectively denied, but in an ironic resolution designed to shock the reader, it is revealed that they too are part of the Party's design. Staig withholds the information that, biologically engineered as child-monsters, the young protagonists have been exploited victims all along, used to perceive the ways in which human minds can be most effectively manipulated. Ultimately they rebel against their 'father', violently killing him and so liberating society from the evil clutches of the Helix Party, but in so doing their insight is fatally confused with the will to destroy rather than affirm life. The dystopian emphasis upon irony as a narrative tool to shock and warn the reader means that rebellious transformation is identified with hatred and violence. Thus although the story may seem to conform in a general way to the optimistic resolution of the conventions of children's literature, its spirit and imagery is likely to imply negativism and pessimism.

Frequently writers seek to overtly raise the speculative possibility of alternative evolution in order to advocate desirable ways of perceiving man's relationship to the natural world. They appear to take the premise that if only man could learn to see himself differently, as a predominantly social and genial species in Gould's sense, rather than a predatory hunter, then we would be better equipped to view ourselves as part of nature, rather than battling with nature. Often these 'lessons' are ones we can learn from animals. Meeker¹⁷ has argued that the science of ecology consistently proves that the natural world is not simpler, but vastly more complex than any human organisation, and 'we have grossly underestimated the animals'. Animals have learnt to mutually co-exist, whereas mankind dominates and wipes

¹⁷Joseph Meeker The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology (New York: Scribner, 1972)

out other species, with a misguided view of his own importance. Meeker suggests that traditional hero myths reinforce this mentality, because they present life as a tragic, bloody spectacle rather than a gigantic comic drama, in which life itself, not abstract virtue (especially when virtue is embedded in the embattled heroic individual) is of paramount importance. Animals, he says, live 'according to the comic mode'. They are dedicated to humbling the enemy without destroying him, they studiously avoid all-or-nothing choices, they accept and encourage maximum diversity and therefore allow the possibility of 'creative waste' and change.

Evolution itself is a gigantic comic drama, not a bloody, tragic spectacle...for evolution does not proceed through battles fought among animals to see who is fit enough to survive and who is not. Rather, the evolutionary process is one of adaptation and accommodation, with the various species exploring opportunistically their environments in search of a means to maintain their existence. Like comedy, evolution is a matter of muddling through.(p.33)

Meeker regards the literary emphasis on war and the conflict of opposites, and particularly what he sees as the role of heroes as 'oppressed idealists' looking for a tragically unattainable perfection which casts them as 'sufferers' or 'martyrs', as unhelpful in the face of humanly caused ecological disaster. He feels that the threat man poses to the planet will best be combated by a 'comic morality' in which, as in evolution, 'nothing is sacred but life itself' and morality is simply 'a matter of getting along with one's fellow creatures.' (p.37) He urges a revised form of 'heroism,' in which the hero is humble, adaptive, absurd and importantly imperfect, for imperfection must be viewed as a virtue which allows change, not a tragic flaw.

This ideological position is also adopted by Lenz¹⁸ on behalf of young readers. She calls the new protagonist a 'hera' or 'biophile'. I write from the assumption that writers for the young are indeed engaged in a similar ideological quest to find 'new myths to live by'. The dystopian form, however, resists the speculative possibility in these terms, because it largely posits¹⁹ 'either/or choices' which resist compromise, or see 'the basic moral assumption of

¹⁸ Millicent Lenz Nuclear Age Fiction for Youth: the Quest for a Life-affirming Ethic (Chicago & London: American Library Assoc., 1980)

¹⁹Bittner (1983) p248.

mutual aid'²⁰ as weakness. Furthermore, as I have consistently demonstrated, the dystopian scenario depicts mankind applying the mentality of conquest, and frequently associates man's 'animal' nature with the bestial and demonic, which leads to a view of the evolutionary process as a tragic, bloody spectacle, in which morally admirable characters are predictably doomed by 'the beast within'.

Hoover's The Delikon²¹, for example, uses the fantastic device of a highly evolved alien species who tries to educate humans into a 'hive' mentality along Wyndham's lines. But because the narrative predominantly focuses on man's political struggle for freedom against the repressive force of the invaders, the novel strikes an ironic tone, which may well prompt the reader to predict that humanity cannot be reformed, or, even if it is, will perceive it negatively as the destruction of individualism. As Griffiths observes²² it is extremely difficult for the contemporary writer to portray a new collective consciousness in a positive light, our habit of mind prizes individualism so highly. Because the dystopian novel places such emphasis on the threat social organisation poses to individual variety, it readily implies a pessimistic view. The narrative problem is to reverse our 'habitual way of thinking.'²³

In My Sister, Sif,²⁴ Park establishes her narrative within a firmly contemporary urban background, characterised by pollution, overcrowding, materialism and, for the teenage protagonist, the divorce of her parents. The two sisters seem to leave these problems behind them, when they return to the place of their birth, the paradisaical island of Rong'an. Isolated from mainland Australia the island seems to represent utopia. Here people co-exist happily, for the island is populated by humans, mer-men, menehune (magical goblin-like creatures) and, most importantly, is the home for many whales, with whom the two girls swim.

The whales represent an idyllic, co-operative social organisation, and it is gradually revealed that the two girls are genetically half-sea creatures themselves, the magical off-spring of the secret community under the sea. Ultimately, however, the paradise is lost, as the waters

²⁰ibid. p.249

²¹H. M. Hoover (New York: Viking, 1977)

²²John Griffiths (1980) p.45

²³Bittner op.cit. p.248

²⁴Ruth Park ((London: Viking Kestrel, 1986)

become polluted and the whales and mermen leave to find another place to live. The two girls must also return to the city, but Sif, who cannot bear to go, dies on her last visit to see her sea-family. Although the sea-creatures clearly represent a desirable development, they are, in the dystopian frame of the story, vulnerable and hopelessly at the mercy of predatory humans. The main teenage protagonist, Riko, finally experiences a foretaste of sexual maturity when she meets a scientist who has come to study Rong'an life, and we are told that she intends to help him change his attitude to the earth that he studies, by making him seek a means of preventing pollution, rather than coldly using the island as a scientific experiment. This seems intended to posit the hope that Riko's peculiar insight into an alternative evolution may allow her to use science to cherish the earth and campaign on its behalf. It seems more likely, however, that the island will be exploited, and that Riko is being hopelessly naive.

One of the most sophisticated and successful attempts to present a radical imaginative conception of humankind can be found in Dickinson's Eva.²⁵ In this novel humanity is seen both from, and in relation with, an animal perspective, namely that of a chimp community. As Hollindale has observed, via Eva, a young human mind transplanted into a chimp's body, Dickinson is 'reconceptualizing the human creature from square one.'²⁶

The novel shows human life through Eva's eyes. The character offers Dickinson the opportunity to challenge and redefine the reader's notions of moral action, which he importantly locates in a process of survival based upon co-operative, non-invasive principles. Eva's dreams represent a new consciousness. Her animal self fully appreciates the (rapidly declining) natural world, in a way that her purely human mind could not. As the first of her kind she represents a new Eve figure and the promise of a new beginning. She allows the reader an insight into a way of thinking which knows that life itself, sheer, physical survival in Meeker's terms, is of paramount importance. As Eva becomes used to her new form, she no longer finds human values to be important. This is hugely comic and, at the same time, deeply distressing. For example, Eva's chimp self has a burning desire to 'rootle' in her mother's hair and ears for fleas. Her mother's understandable reaction

²⁵Peter Dickinson (London: Gollancz, 1988. rpt. London: Corgi Freeway, 1991)

²⁶ Peter Hollindale 'The Adolescent Novel of Ideas' CLE (1995) p. 94

simultaneously calls the niceties of human etiquette amusingly into question, but also suggests the extreme pain of a woman who cannot adapt to view this creature in the same way that she saw her daughter. Although Eva learns to accommodate both selves, few others can.

Repeatedly Dickinson underlines that it is Eva's capacity to learn - her openness to new modes of perception and new insights - which is vital to her adaptability and hence her literal survival. As a chimp, she has no physical power to fight or compete. Eva's revised 'power' lies in her feminine humility and her ability to adapt initially to the social environment that the matriarchal chimp community represents. She learns, for instance, the chimps' social rules rely on displays of humble submission, and gradually she learns to 'lead' them by suggestion and co-operation, rather than force.

This humility gradually transforms into her capacity to help the 'tribe' to adapt to the opportunity of a new paradise. Eva persuades (or manipulates) humans into allowing her to be filmed on an island. She uses her 'gift' from her human side, her imagination and her capacity to step outside the constraints of her own particular circumstance, to achieve a new vision of possibility, not tied by what is, but determined by what might be. Viewed this way, her human side is not simply a matter of being able to perform technical accomplishments, but represents her insight. This, combined with a chimp's instinctive insights into the vital importance of life, allow her to perceive *herself* in a new perspective, part of a future chain of continuity, not simply as an individual, an essential 'pattern..different from any other pattern that ever was, or will be' (p.22) Her individuality is never sacrificed by her admittance to the group, instead it is enhanced. She forms a vital part of the past and future, a part of the greater pattern of evolutionary development. She learns, in short, to see herself *in* nature, not opposed to it. Thus for Eva, life - all life, not just her own - becomes a journey, and a ceaseless search (which Swinfen observes is a chief characteristic of utopian writing.) The end of the book may suggest a new beginning for the species. This hope is rooted in the preceding narrative. It looks forward beyond Eva's life, because she has left the new species a gift for the future and has begun to educate others (humans and chimps) for freedom.

Like Andra, however, the speculative fantasy element is set firmly within a dystopian framework. Human materialism is inexorably destroying nature, collectively the human species is beyond redemption. In Eva no human ever really understands another co-operative way of life, because humans are only able to see in terms of heroic conquest. Humans consistently sieve experience through their own view of life as a battle. They tell false stories, in which male heroes conquer and dominate their heroines. When Sniff, a male chimp, rescues Eva from being recaptured on the island, they misinterpret his gesture, seeing it as a brave act of defiance in the face of adversity. Only Eva can see he has no concept of courage, but is simply acting to preserve life, all life, particularly to ensure the future chance of propagating offspring with Eva. The gap between the view of life held by most humans in the book and the view held by the chimps is finally underscored as Dickinson depicts the consequences in dystopian terms: the would-be invaders ironically bring about their own extinction. The danger is that, in so doing, they are likely to wipe out the animal populations too.

If the novel's close represents a new beginning for Eva's community, it is the end for the human species, who commit suicide in vast numbers. Eva is finally faced with an either/or choice because of the urgent nature of the dystopian scenario. She finally chooses to reject, not accept human mistakes, turning her back on her father and ultimately her own human self:

It was a part of dying, coming in two like that. (p.235)

It is likely that the sombre tone of the book's close will imply a poignant reading, and the reader will infer that humanity is woefully ill-equipped to maintain the complexity of the natural world.²⁷ Eva herself may be interpreted legitimately as a powerless victim throughout, manipulated, even literally created by the Shaper TV companies who warp human perceptions. Her human 'gift' may well be read with an ironic interpretation. Like Z for Zachariah, multiple readings are valid, consistently presented throughout the whole text.

²⁷See, for example, J. Archer and W. Wall, 'Eva: Peter Dickinson' In Brief Issue No5 Dec 1991, ed. E. Hammill, p10 (Newcastle: Waterstone's Booksellers)

Eva is unusual in that it makes use of the comic mode to place humanity in a new perspective. Dickinson uses comic moments to poke fun at human social pretension, and although there is a serious point to the laughter, the tone of the writing is far from the biting satire to which the dystopian novel typically resorts.²⁸ The fact that humans consistently find Eva's animal characteristics distasteful is very funny. They only want a sanitised version of nature, and are quite content to love her when she is ridiculously dressed in human overalls, but are extremely uncomfortable when she comes into heat, or bears chimp children. Eva disarmingly but pointedly uses a kiss, which she plants on a smug TV presenter's horrified lips, as a weapon, but more typically she tries to protect adult humans from her physical chimp reality.

In so doing, she becomes newly empowered and responsible, more 'adult' by far than the naive and childish humans in the book's world. Dickinson's is a generous view of a foolish species, rather than a savage attack on a brutal and brutalising one. By making this comic perspective available within his work, he fundamentally presents a vision which celebrates life itself, seeing human life in relation to death, considering temporal existence in relation to the vast evolutionary perspective, which extends backwards to the past and forwards to the unforeseeable future. There is a difference in the mode of fantasy here. These are philosophic idealisms, rather than the 'social and political idealisms' typically expressed by the dystopian form.²⁹ The classic dystopia, after all, ironically resists the idea that there will be a future in the narrative's terms.

Eva is not embattled against a social order which she must fight to overthrow. Dickinson successfully identifies her with life-affirming qualities and not with destruction, selfish aggression and nihilism. Eva is a rebel, but her rebellion is based on kindness, flexibility, insight, laughter, imagination and a love of the world's possibilities. In one sense she is not extraordinary, but allows Dickinson to convincingly present and celebrate the easily overlooked qualities that humans possess. The novel's comedy becomes a binding concept,

²⁸As displayed by Westall's Futuretrack 5, or the 'sick humour to go with a sick world' in Ure's Plague 1999.

²⁹Swinfen (1984) p. 190

providing a 'line through disorder.'³⁰ Hope is represented by the possibility that the maverick is able 'to put the commonplace in the driver's seat of history.'³¹ This is the basis for a new philosophical system of belief, a way of looking at life, and importantly not just human life. The ability to speculate - the imagination - may be seen as a tool by which humanity learns to innovate and adapt, seeing itself in a new comic perspective.

I do not want to overplay Dickinson's use of the comic spirit in Eva, but have amplified the comic interpretation he makes available to illustrate its imaginative, speculative possibilities for presenting humanity in a new light, and to highlight how unusual it is in futuristic fiction for the young. Eva's realistic dystopian elements are likely to subdue such a reading. I simply wish to draw attention to how seldom it occurs, despite the frequency with which children's writers try to make an optimistic reading of human qualities available within their texts.

Harvey Cox, in The Feast of Fools,³² has observed that our images of the future currently tend to be extrapolatory, drawn from extensions of the present. He views this current emphasis on the manageable, the feasible and the probable as misguided. He urges that we shift the focus of our attention from social and political reasoning toward the spiritual, in an attempt to reinstate the numinous.³³ He concludes

Because we have placed an enormous emphasis on man the worker...and man the thinker....Man's celebrative and imaginative faculties have atrophied.³⁴

Cox seeks to reinstate 'festivity and fantasy' as a means of preventing future human catastrophe.

The survival of mankind as a species has .. been placed in jeopardy by the repression of festivity and fantasy...This is because man inhabits a world of constant change, and in such a world both festival and fantasy are indispensable for survival. If he is to survive man must be both innovative and adaptive...Festivity, by breaking routine and opening

³⁰Inglis F (1981) p.4

³¹Gould, S J (1993) p.283

³² H. Cox The Feast of Fools (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969)

³³See also David Rees The Marble in the Water p.83

³⁴ibid. p.11

man to the past, enlarges his experience and reduces his provincialism. Fantasy opens doors that merely empirical calculation ignores.³⁵

Like Inglis and Meeker, he sees comedy as a binding concept, requiring collective memories and hopes, which allows man to see himself more humbly in a greater perspective. Fundamentally he argues we must learn to see *ourselves* differently, and positively. We need new angles of perception. He emphasises the need to freely speculate, to learn to welcome change, and looks to fantasy as a means of focusing upon 'visionary aspirations' rather than emphasising our fears. 'Creative discontinuity', he asserts, will best enable us to become 'innovative and adaptive.'³⁶ He believes these qualities are best served by ways of speculating about the future which cut free from the merely plausible, and which emphasise 'non-instrumental' possibilism. This, too, emphasises fantasy's traditional preoccupations with philosophic idealism, rather than social and political idealism. Cox's ideology is consciously based upon a view of life, and 'human nature,' rather than focusing upon social organisation. It is a question of emphasis rather than principle, but I think the distinctions are important ones to make, because they have a bearing on the texts I finally want to consider.

I will now turn to the few futuristic works produced for the young which do not present a predominantly dystopian vision. Instead of focusing upon predictable and plausible social and political questions of the near-future, they use a 'different mode of fantasy'³⁷ which is more clearly speculative, because it presents an essentially unpredictable far-future. Scholes,³⁸ like Swinfen, sees these fantasies as a different kind of fiction. He observes that (adult) works of the future are magnetically polarised into distinct categories. Whereas those clustering around the naturalistic near-future predictions emphasise social questions, those of the far-future 'take a stance which is ...philosophically speculative.'³⁹ Whilst recognising that writers such as Dickinson have managed to combine the two, I would agree that, on the whole, these distinctions are borne out by children's futuristic writing.

³⁵ibid. p.12

³⁶Cox p.12

³⁷Swinfen op.cit. p.190

³⁸Scholes Structural Fabulation p.71

³⁹ ibid. p.71

Advocates of 'high' fantasy,⁴⁰ in which the writer creates an imaginary 'other' or 'secondary' world, believe that this mode of writing best lends itself to particular imaginative effects. Because the action clearly occurs in a non-existent, unreal world and involves incredible characters it is not constrained by the plausible and predictable. As a result it can use the marvellous and magic ('anything outside the space-time continuum of the everyday world which cannot exist in the world of empirical experience'⁴¹) as key narrative tactics. The use of magic and the marvellous may seem 'irrational', but in high fantasy, as Wilson⁴² points out this is not necessarily 'a lapse from rationality, but instead becomes a systematic, purposeful element in the text.' The fantasist still has to convince the reader of the 'reality' of his world by providing a consistency of ideas and physical detail which Dickinson has described as a 'map of coherence.'⁴³

Unlike realists, fantasists are not concerned with creating a plausible, extrapolatory future. Their futures are purely a product of the imagination, and may appear extravagant and unrestrained. In this way the imagination is liberated from what will be, and may be best situated to restructure our habitual assumptions. Because the secondary world suspends the rules of what constitutes everyday reality, and is not hampered by how it came into being, it is able to focus instead on radical differences. In this sense it is 'possibility' fiction.⁴⁴ Griffiths⁴⁵ claims that fantasy is not content to dream up interesting twists within existing societal patterns, but envisions entirely new ones, without first having to ask whether they are possible. This enables it to strike out to a whole new order, rather than simply attempting to rearrange the furniture. Swinfen⁴⁶ also argues that the fantasy writer is freer to construct not only his settings and characters, but also sets of ideals, philosophies, beliefs and world orders. Because the reader is consciously aware that the fictional world is an analogy, rather than understanding the fictional future as extrapolation⁴⁷ he will be less

⁴⁰Stephens p126

⁴¹Swinfen op.cit. p. 4

⁴²Wilson 'What is Magic?' p.170

⁴³Dickinson 'Fantasy: the Need for Realism' CLE 17, No.1, (1986) p.49

⁴⁴See Scholes p.70, Wehemeyer p.51

⁴⁵Griffiths Three Tomorrows

⁴⁶Swinfen op.cit p.123

⁴⁷Bittner p.248 'Unlike Huxley, however, who understood his book to be about the future and judged its value in terms of the plausibility of its forecasts, Le Guin understands science fiction to be analogy, not extrapolation: she uses the devices of estrangement in fictional thought experiments to ask questions which are "reversals of our habitual way of thinking." '

likely to react to the story's development in a literal sense, and less likely to predict the outcome in realistic terms. These fictions are often seen as the best means of exploring profound ideas, and achieving levels of radical originality and creativity which 'could only happen in a secondary world.'⁴⁸

Fantasy may require a high level of intellectual engagement. Dickinson, for example, has seen 'fantasy as the poetry of ideas.'⁴⁹ Fantasies are best disposed to ask 'what if?' and to consider the consequences of an 'original axiom change' which can be used to 'discover new truths'.⁵⁰ They readily act as literary experiments, although it is important to recognise that realistic children's writers similarly describe the function of their stories.⁵¹ Stephens has drawn attention to 'the urge to polarize fantasy and realism into rival genres'⁵² and warns that defences of fantasy often implicitly (and misguidedly) assume that 'realist' 'writing is restricted to surfaces'.⁵³ Dickinson, like Griffiths, emphasises the point that the reader is encouraged to approach them as analogies, and so 'the literature of the Other does something different'.⁵⁴ He forwards the idea that fantasies work to uncover hitherto hidden truths. He uses the analogy of the manipulation of mathematical concepts

Some equations can only be solved by invoking the square root of minus one, a number which cannot exist. The original question was solid enough and the answer is solid enough, but the mathematician can only get there by going through the realm of fantasy.⁵⁵

So although fantasy emphasises the non-instrumental in Cox's sense, it 'may open the doors that merely empirical calculation ignores'.⁵⁶ It is seen by Swinfen as being characterised by a 'search' and is not an escape from reality, but an investigation into it.⁵⁷ It may aim to catch our unexpected ignorance, thereby exposing general limitations in perception and knowledge. Suvin⁵⁸ describes the new perspective it can achieve as 'estrangement' or

⁴⁸Swinfen, loc.cit p. 92

⁴⁹Dickinson, op.cit p.48

⁵⁰Dickinson, loc.cit p.47

⁵¹See, for example Walsh in 'The Writer's Responsibility', where she describes her fiction as an 'experiment'.

⁵²Stephens quoted in Hunt (1992) p.78

⁵³ibid p.79

⁵⁴op cit p.47

⁵⁵ibid p.47

⁵⁶Cox, loc cit p.12

⁵⁷Swinfen, p.10

⁵⁸Quoted in Scholes (1975) p. 46

'defamiliarisation', helping to prevent us from leaping to familiar meanings. It is often, however, mistakenly dismissed as frivolous and childish.⁵⁹

I work from the assumption that children's writers are genuinely trying to find stories which facilitate a transformation in present consciousness, helping us to explore ways to achieve a more just, peaceful and free life. Perhaps it is the case, then, that discontinuous fantasy, portraying worlds markedly 'other' from the present empirical world, may, if not more readily begin to challenge deep-seated assumptions or widely-accepted 'truths' than the admonitory literature of the plausible, near-future, then at least they may do so more safely, with less danger of a young reader misinterpreting the 'message'. Fantasy may indeed be 'an indispensable tool for survival'.⁶⁰ I believe that Le Guin has turned to the form for precisely these reasons. I will consider her classic children's fantasy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*⁶¹ to illuminate the particular imaginative effects she achieves and to explore her use of the secondary world to express her moral meaning.

This children's classic epitomises the potential for speculative fantasy to present a new corpus of values. Le Guin's world is clearly 'other', and, unlike dystopian writing, makes no attempt to provide 'concrete realisations of current trends'.⁶² Earthsea's physical laws are strange and implausible. Le Guin's characters live in a world of magic and the marvellous, in which Ged, the protagonist, has the power to work wonders of illusion and physical transformation. The narrative emphasis is placed firmly upon the unpredictable, asking the reader to negotiate an understanding of the ways in which the imaginary world works.

In Le Guin's hands this narrative technique lends itself to particular imaginative effects. Her secondary world's fundamental premises are radically changed, so that Le Guin is able to offer a new perspective on life in our material world. Earthsea itself is coherently recreated to represent 'the universe as a dynamic, balanced system, not subject to the capricious miracles of any deity, but only to the natural laws of its own working, which include a role

⁵⁹See Hughes (quoted by John Stephens in Hunt (1992) p.78); Wendy Jago 'A Wizard of Earthsea and the Charge of Escapism' *CLE* 8 pp.21-29

⁶⁰Cox, loc cit p.12

⁶¹Ursula Le Guin (Emeryville: Parnassus, 1968. rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1984)

⁶²Scholes p.70

for magic and for powers other than human, but only as aspects of the great Balance or Equilibrium'.⁶³ Fantasy allows Le Guin to present the idea of the universe as a 'self-regulating structure',⁶⁴ thus allowing readers to imaginatively experience the consequences of this idea, and to creatively question man's role within such a system.

Earthsea represents an ambiguous utopia in which humans can be portrayed as part of an indivisible, delicately inter-related and complex system. Because Le Guin's world is Godless, human action is seen as a consequence of its own moral self-regulation. Collectively man has evolved by adapting to a new way of living in, rather than ruling over, the environment. There is nothing sentimental or nostalgic about this portrayal: Le Guin is not content to evade the serious questions raised by the dystopian imagination by suggesting a naive social harmony. In Earthsea life is tough, fragile, but importantly and valuably *imperfect*, truly reflecting the world to which it has adapted. Each island harbours varied populations, all largely self-determining and politically diverse, although principally dependent on the educated and wise magicians from Roke and united in their fears of the wild dragons who inhabit their lands.

Unlike the classic dystopian writers, Le Guin's story is not primarily concerned with social and political conflict, but focuses instead upon human behaviour when man is seen in relation to the environment, rather than to other social organisations. Within this imaginative context, which is crucially represented as mutually dependent rather than conflicting, the novel attempts to redefine the concept of heroism as traditionally conceived. Le Guin claimed her writing was 'an attempt to lose the old hero myths to find something worthy of admiration'.⁶⁵ Ged is not at war with his own society, embattled against the social order like dystopian protagonists. Instead he is accepted and admired by those who influence others' perceptions at Roke. In one sense Ged's story is a traditionally heroic quest of sin and redemption, but he is not made to conquer others. Like Eva his revised 'power' is ultimately presented as an ability to transform his own consciousness. He represents a change in perception, he learns to see life, and particularly himself, differently.

⁶³Scholes, op cit p.82

⁶⁴Scholes, loc.cit p.82

⁶⁵Cited in Lenz (1990) p.xii

Ged is introduced as an ambiguous hero. He is crucially described as a 'wild weed'. Like the 'pioneer species' Meeker⁶⁶ describes, he is opportunistic, adaptable, able to thrive in apparently harsh circumstances. Throughout the novel his successes or victories do not emanate from physical domination or conquest, but because he learns to identify life itself - all life- as being of primary importance. As such Le Guin identifies him with the saintly and life-affirming.⁶⁷

Ged's first lessons are from the mage Ogion, who teaches the boy about humility and respect for the natural world and 'the great slow movement of trees'. Ged is impatient and headstrong, and desires to learn higher, more powerful arts at Roke, but importantly cannot enter the school for wizards until he has secured the co-operation and friendship of the Doorkeeper. All of Ged's early lessons centre upon the need for congeniality and acceptance rather than force.

Ged, however, persists in seeing life as a competition. This view makes him seem childish. Le Guin portrays him as a foolish, absurd figure who fails to avoid the mess that he makes of his life. Ged's flaw, which results in the loosing of the shadow, is presented as a schoolboy brawl, thus emphasising the triviality of human arrogance rather than the horror of innate aggression. He is not a player in a mighty contest with powers that are greater than his. Nothing determines Ged's welfare or suffering other than his own perceptions. Ged's competition with Jasper makes him look ridiculous in relation to the civilised system of collective ethical and social behaviour that Roke has evolved. When the protective adult, Nemmerle, gives his own life to save the child, Ged begins at last to appreciate the damage his competitive perceptions may wreak upon the world. Ged is not, however, a victim, like the protagonists of the dystopian novel. In the secondary world of fantasy he has real power, the capacity to destroy or preserve Equilibrium.

Ged is not punished by Roke, for Le Guin's didacticism means that he must not be seen to be externally checked. He must learn self-regulation, and his quest for knowledge (which Le

⁶⁶Meeker *Comedy of Survival* p.27 'Many of the species that men find objectionable...are pioneering'

⁶⁷David Rees (1979) has likened Ged to the Christ figure in Hopkins' 'Windhover' p.79

Guin equates with power) follows his growing ability to see himself differently. Although he is a powerful wizard, the novel's didacticism relies upon a redefinition of power: Ged repeatedly chooses *not* to act, not to compete. Power, true power, in A Wizard of Earthsea becomes redefined as *insight* and vision: the power to understand one's relationship to the world.

Ged's quest for peace, particularly his ability to adapt to any circumstance, becomes newly heroic. His magical powers become a metaphor for this insight, enabling him to transform his essential make-up. He is empowered to change his shape to a hawk, discovering that physical survival may lie in humble flight rather than hunting and killing. For Ged, nothing is sacred but life itself. In attempting to save a dying boy's life, for instance, although he fails, he learns to revere his own life. He learns from the humble otak's example as the creature instinctively licks Ged as a fellow wounded creature, not as a master. Gradually Ged is able to see himself as a part of the ecosystem, and realises that essentially life is a process of muddling through. It is not concerned predominantly with hunting and killing, nor with progress nor perfection because, as Meeker observes

...productive ecosystems are those which minimise destructive aggression, encourage maximum diversity, and seek to establish equilibrium among the participants.⁶⁸

By the end of the novel Ged has changed totally. He no longer sees himself as the centre of the world, and no longer dreams of transforming his surroundings. His learned wisdom recognises the need to adapt, that life is not a battle, that by accepting, not rejecting his own imperfection and embracing his mistake he can become 'whole' and 'free.'⁶⁹ By adapting to his own muddles 'Ged had neither lost nor won'.⁷⁰ Le Guin's imaginative triumph is to conceive a world in which survival and peace are exciting, newly heroic. Human power in A Wizard of Earthsea is not conflated with control. Le Guin has recreated a view of humanity whose moral development and physical survival have moved in the same direction. In Earthsea man is governed not by imposed taboos, but constrained by instinct, because physical survival depends upon congeniality and humility, not the capacity for violence.

⁶⁸Meeker, op.cit p.27

⁶⁹Le Guin, p.199

⁷⁰Le Guin, loc. cit.

This is to present evolution as a new basis for freedom. Le Guin uses her secondary world to question what humanity could look like if it *did* alter its behaviour. Her radical speculation is paradoxically established in a deeply conservative framework⁷¹ which I would trace to her view of the evolutionary mechanism. As Meeker points out, evolution rests on the premise that

...all change is conservative.../...To say that change is conservative may confuse anyone who thinks the term is the antonym of liberal and that it describes a mental attitude in favor of traditional social values and customs. The conservative principle in biology is evolutionary; it refers to those variations in structure and behavior which adapt an organism more perfectly to a changing environment, thus conserving its genetic continuity despite changes in form. ⁷²

Admittedly Le Guin's relationship with her reader is conservative, and she requires the reader to converge on the dominant ideology of the text: to accept her reading of the world and the Great Balance. In the hands of a lesser artist this may seem like the writer is doing too much work on the reader's behalf (a valid criticism, I believe, of the next writer I am about to consider). In Le Guin's hands, however, this simplicity of design⁷³ does not exclude profound philosophical depth nor literary richness.⁷⁴ This is partly due to the novel's mythical⁷⁵ and allusive power, which allows the imaginative world to resonate in the reader's mind. In this sense Le Guin's fiction is far from restrictive or restricting. Ged has larger-than-life universal qualities, which encourage the reader to view him as an idea of humanity, for example. The reader is consistently invited to link concepts both within the work and between the text's world and the present day. In this respect the novel actively invites the reader to engage in the construction of meaning. As Scholes suggests, for instance, Le Guin uses magic as a fictional analogy, making it 'function like science'⁷⁶ to discover 'about the nature of the universe.' In short, the didactic nature of the work does not disrupt the fictional world. The novel's power is largely due to the profound imaginative consistency of Le Guin's imagined world. My exploration of Le Guin's evolutionary ideas

⁷¹See Rees (1979) p.82

⁷²Meeker pp.33-34

⁷³See Hollindale 'The Young Adolescent Novel of Ideas' p.89

⁷⁴See Rees p.78, who suggests that Le Guin's work 'is almost as rich in suggestion and association as the poetry of TS Eliot'.

⁷⁵ibid. p.80-87

⁷⁶Scholes p.82

shows that the submerged agenda (the author's view of human nature and the forces which govern life) does not contradict the surface theme and her pedagogic impetus, which recommends the need for humanity to respect the principle of Equilibrium. At deep and surface levels Le Guin consistently focuses upon the Balance: within the individual and in the larger system. Ideological explicitness is not bought at the cost of imaginative depth.

Rees argues that the narrator adopts a role which is similar to Ged's adult teachers, offering young readers 'loving but firm' advice,⁷⁷ a didactic approach which differs dramatically from 'the vast majority' of children's novels (which he claims depict adult figures 'whose lack of belief in themselves and anything outside themselves in many instances imprisons the young in immaturity.'⁷⁸) Rees values Le Guin's positive statements, which he sees as an antidote to the nihilism of so many teenage novels. In Le Guin's novels, he says, adults 'do have something to offer the young.'⁷⁹ Whilst I recognise that Rees's comments are ideologically loaded, I think his observations serve to emphasise the point that the imaginative focus of Le Guin's fantasy is firmly placed upon an optimistic frame of reference. Instead of calling upon the reader's fears (as the dystopia's admonitory function requires) she is able to highlight hope. Le Guin's writing never assumes the urgency of books discussed in former chapters, possibly because there is less perceived danger in a (child) misreading the significance of this basically optimistic worldview.

Yet *Earthsea* is not, as Bittner⁸⁰ points out, a blueprint for utopia, but is a process, a way of thinking. Any utopia, as Swinfen⁸¹ observes, is never static, and Ged's end is a new beginning. The novel ends by placing Ged, like Eva, in a greater evolutionary perspective. A celebratory song closes the novel, but it concerns the creation of *Earthsea*, not Ged's heroic deed, which Le Guin underlines will be scarcely remembered in the long-term future. Unlike Eva, Ged unequivocally 'wins', by conquering himself, but Le Guin stresses that Ged, despite his power, (and, by analogy, mankind) is, in the larger scheme of things, relatively

⁷⁷Rees p.82

⁷⁸*ibid* p.83

⁷⁹Rees, loc.cit.

⁸⁰Bittner p.24 'She regards binary relationships not as opposites, but as interacting complements, and conceives of the Way as a balanced and dynamic synthesis of opposites.'

⁸¹Swinfen op.cit. p.227 'Utopia, to have any meaning, must not stand still, it must always look to the future.'

unimportant. In this way the novel's form reinforces the theme: highlighting the discovery that the process of thinking about the individual in relation to the larger environment is vital.

In its original conception A Wizard of Earthsea formed the first part of a trilogy, allowing Le Guin to create the sense of a narrative future for Ged, whose story would be continued. This literary form also enables the first story to become part of a larger total pattern: to emphasise Ged's maturation and change, within a basically conservative framework. This is totally consistent with her didactic objective and it is probably no coincidence that the two speculative fantasies I will finally consider also adopt the trilogy format to better enable the authors to imaginatively focus upon change and the meaning of change. Each seeks to place humanity in the larger perspective of non-human time.

Halam and Hamilton both use fantastic far-future secondary worlds to focus attention upon *uncertainty* and the possibility of remarkable and hopeful future developments from the very outset of their stories. Like Le Guin, their narratives use fantasy to radically redefine what we view as human nature. This radicalism rests, however, upon a conservative principle in Meeker's sense, rather than the sudden and implausible alteration so often found as a magical solution in dystopian realism. Both achieve this, I believe, by consistently suggesting a view of the evolutionary mechanism in which survival relies upon adaptation and uncertainty rather than conflict. This allows them to suggest futures in which moral and physical development may move, and are even likely to move, in the same direction, without compromising the possibility that moral decline implies dire consequences.

Ann Halam's Daymaker trilogy⁸² is set in a future time when technology has been banished and the world of Inland is made entirely of magic. Inland, led by its teachers at Hillen Coven, has decided to live in Equilibrium and Balance:

The human race had made a new Covenant with the natural world: to do no harm. Weather and earth and crops and beasts were willingly obedient to the new gentle power of magic. ⁸³

⁸²The Daymaker (London: Orchard, 1987. Rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1989); Transformations (London: Orchard, 1988. Rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1990); The Skybreaker (London: Orchard, 1990. Rpt. Harmondsworth: Puffin, 1992)

⁸³Halam Skybreaker p.7

Halam repeatedly emphasises the function of her secondary world: Inland's physical existence emanates from the collective will. It is a world entirely made of magic, allowing her to physically represent the consciousness and desires of its people.

Down in the depths of things, Inland was not made of rock and earth and water. It was made of meaning and magic - and every rock stood, every blade of grass grew only through the countless thoughts, wishes and desires of all Inlanders, balancing and checking one another.⁸⁴

The centrepiece of the novel is the environment, and the socio-political context of the novel receives less overt attention than it does in the dystopian novels discussed in former chapters. Halam never explores how such a world came into existence, further than conveying the idea that our world has destroyed itself through greed and materialism. She never dwells upon the disaster itself. The imaginative focus is, instead, on the world of magic in which 'meaning and substance are one'. This encourages the reader to view the fictional world in terms of an analogy, rather than a prediction. This strategy allows Halam the opportunity to explore the consequences and complexity of the Balance demanded by an ecosystem occurring in the natural world, and also allows for the possibility of an empowered humanity. People are not trapped victims of a ruthless natural or social order, but have the capacity to change both themselves and the world they create by becoming freely co-operating individuals committed to a sane alternative. Halam takes the premise that magic, as in *Earthsea*, is a

belief in the power of thought.../ a system of thought... where all thinking and feeling have the power to bring things about (in the mind)... Its chief function is to bring about a desired state of mind⁸⁵

Because it is committed to peace, Hillen Coven has forbidden itself the means to force individuals to comply. Instead Hillen relies upon the 'natural' or instinctive self-regulation of a species who wishes to survive. In the restructured magic world this does not imply that Hillen is weak. Instead Halam uses her fantasy world to redefine the meaning of power.

⁸⁴*Transformations* p.155

⁸⁵Anne Wilson 'What is Magic?' pp. 171/173

Halam presents power in terms of the ability to adapt, which in Inland becomes associated with the insight that co-operation and acceptance, not conflict and rejection, is the best strategy for survival.

As in A Wizard of Earthsea, the novels negotiate the difficult and complex balance between individual and environment, for Zanne too is a powerful figure who appears, like Ged, to potentially upset, even destroy, the magic world. Inland's delicate and complex constitution similarly depends upon the teenage protagonist's ability to become free and whole by adapting to the muddles she creates. Zanne, a prodigy like Ged, but significantly female, is unusual insofar as she secretly loves the machines of the old times and longs to see the world as it had been, when other Inlanders hate and fear the past. Inland has chosen to reject the past and has severed all links with it. In the first book, The Daymaker, Zanne wilfully sets out to find an old powerhouse and to waken the daymaker. She learns, however, the cost of that reawakening, which would destroy the magic land because it would take up too much power and drain the natural world of scarce (magical) resources. Instead she freely concurs with the system of belief of Inland, seeing oneself in humility and perspective in the world. And so, though she loved the machine she killed it,

...with the same humble words her mother would have used to slaughter a sheep
...sister, don't blame me. I will die too, and be eaten... (Transformations p.7)

Only Zanne can perform this task of transformation, because only she is able to love the makers and therefore give a 'good and natural' covenanted death, so as not to allow hate and fear into a world in which meaning and substance are one. At first Zanne accepts this truth and accepts the role of Maker Killer, which, like Ged, means she is valued and, despite her abnormality, is not an outcast at odds with society. The people of Inland perceive that survival relies upon variety.

Ultimately, however, both Zanne and Hillen begin to recognise that they must make the most of the chance opportunity Zanne represents. Zanne's ability to see the underlying patterns and to integrate them into a holistic vision is repeatedly stressed

Her vision had cleared. Now she could see. The world was like a picture, one of those pictures that can be a cup, or a tree. Both patterns are there, but the picture cannot be both. It has to be one or the other.

Most people in Inland saw the Covenant picture only. Zanne saw both worlds.

At first Zanne is deluded into having to choose, exclusively, believing that to see one world would destroy Inland. She believes that if she chooses her old self, and the old world, then she will 'unmake Inland' (p.161) But ultimately Zanne learns to see the similarities between the two worlds she sees, and begins to make herself whole. Although the idea that the pattern of life itself has in theory underpinned Inland

Under the Covenant you could never make terms with a part of anything, it had to be the whole (p.51)

the full implications are not immediately felt. Zanne learns not to yearn to go back, but to change, to look ahead to 'a different accomplishment, a different beauty.' (Transformations p.7) Unlike Ged, Zanne learns to change the world, making it what she needs it to be. She has the capacity to see 'beneath the forms, to where the "alien" makers and the natural world were one...' (p.7 Transformations)

In the second part of the trilogy she becomes a teacher, who is sent to Minith, a hard mountain community which is trapped by its own perception of perfection. Minithers believe that they must try to protect the rest of Inland from some ancient poison that is buried deep in their mines. They believe they need to suffer to save others from the 'plague' that it causes, and they enforce strict unnatural taboos, forbidding music and ultimately being prepared to sacrifice their own children. Like the child-Ged, they make the mistake of failing to recognise the value of their own lives. Zanne teaches them not to fear the past, but to 'trust it, to accept it.' She has to change their way of seeing the world in order to change that world. Their fear results in a world of fear, their horror of imperfection means, in the secondary world, that imperfection *is* horrifying. Zanne allows them to see that help lies in co-operation and their ability to connect with rest of world, not in isolation. She manages to encourage Holne to change his mind, overthrowing convention to become a male covenantor. As a Minither he is best equipped to 'teach these rock people to laugh at themselves',

thereby seeing themselves humbly in a comic perspective. Throughout the trilogy Zanne's ability to laugh is crucial. Laughter and music have evolved as important forms of social cement.

Finally Zanne begins to question the basis for her own beliefs, and she wonders why she should give death to makers and the past, rather than truly accepting them. As Zanne's perceptions enlarge and she acts as teacher and guide to others, so Inland, which is made of meaning, changes too. In the final novel, The Skybreaker Zanne redeems Magia, which has dedicated itself to 'a flawed vision that sees only a single objective and never counts the cost: *that cares only for a part, never the whole.*' (p.190) At last Ido Covenor sees the need to accept the past

Zanne was right all along. A world that's made of meaning can't grow healthily if it is rooted in hate and fear, however deeply buried. This way is much better...this time their dream could be achieved.. without harm. And not merely without harm..From now on *there would be another way, Zanne's way.* Not to deny but to transform: not to destroy the past, but to make it live again. Under the Covenant and within What Is. (p.198)

Thus Zanne 'had changed the very meaning of the magic world.' Inland can learn to value the creative achievements of the past once more, not complacently and thoughtlessly, but by constantly considering the impact of science. Ultimately Inland re-creates a spaceship, not simply because it can, as was previously the case (in our world), but because the people now perceive it differently. In Inland, it is what they have made it

...the sign and symbol of those deep places of the mind's world, where What Is shows itself in beauty and terror. (p.200)

Like Le Guin's novel, the writing is heavily didactic, but does not achieve what Scholes describes as the 'poetry of the balance'⁸⁶ which Earthsea represents. It is interesting, however, insofar as it uses the fantastic mode to view the future world, and the human nature which has adapted to it, not as a battleground, but as a complex ecosystem in which co-operation is the natural characteristic. Halam uses her secondary world speculatively, to

⁸⁶Scholes (1975) p.86

regender the future, and to posit a future which does not require the heroine to make absolute either/or choices.

Finally I wish to consider the futuristic trilogy by Virginia Hamilton, which is often known as the Justice Cycle. Hamilton's work resists any attempt to polarise fantasy and realism into rival genres. Unlike Le Guin's work, Hamilton's story begins in the primary world, and her protagonists (eleven year old Justice, her twin brothers, Thomas and Levi, and their friend, Dorian) are, unlike Ged, very ordinary contemporary youngsters. In the first book Hamilton depicts the vacillations of teenage family life, with its intense loves and rivalries, hopes and fears. Her achievement, however, is to defamiliarise the ordinary, to celebrate it and to depict it in terms of wonder. Her remarkable ability to combine supernatural elements with *the compelling stories of the realistic struggles of teenage protagonists* characterises much of her work. In the preface to Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush,⁸⁷ she is quoted as follows:

Being a teenager sets a person apart...They go through a great deal of pain and suffering...It amazes me that out of oppression and want and need can come brotherhood and sisterhood and beauty. The final analysis is one of growing consciousness. (p.3)

This encapsulates Hamilton's approach to the theme of adolescence, which is epitomised in *the Justice Cycle*. The imaginative focus of the first novel⁸⁸ is placed upon the 'natural' capacity of the young to adapt to their fluctuating sense of emergent identity, and the *consequent exhilaration* and terror of the changes they undergo. Hamilton endows Justice and her brothers with extra-sensory perceptions, but the idea that the children are mutants is introduced so skilfully that their marvellous powers simply seem to be extensions of the imaginative qualities that humans, particularly the young, already possess.

At the end of the novel the children form 'First Unit,' their minds travelling to a hugely unpredictable far-future, which is a barren and inhospitable land of dust. The second novel⁸⁹ focuses upon their experiences in Dustland. The secondary world allows Hamilton to explicitly employ the imaginative vocabulary of evolution to act as a moral metaphor. The

⁸⁷Virginia Hamilton (New York: Philomel, 1982. Rpt. London: Walker, 1990)

⁸⁸Justice and her Brothers (New York: Greenwillow, 1978. Rpt. London: Harcourt Brace, 1989)

⁸⁹Dustland (New York: Greenwillow, 1981. Rpt. London: Harcourt Brace, 1989)

powerful psychic events she depicts are used to show the emergence of a symbiosis among all beings, and to represent a remarkable change in what we view as human.

In one sense *Dustland* can be seen, like *Earthsea*, to suggest a state of sophisticated equilibrium. The centrepiece of the novel is not political nor technological, but views humanity in relation to the environment. Although *Dustland* initially appears to be incapable of sustaining life, particularly in contrast with the rich fauna of First Unit's native Ohio, the young travellers gradually realise that it, too, teems with life, although its creatures are drastically unlike anything they have previously encountered. First Unit begins to learn the secrets of *Dustland* by watching 'worlmas,' strange bullet-shaped 'beasties' who the children at first regard as primitive jokes, scarcely worthy of attention. They are dismissively amused *when the creatures continue to crawl around after death, comically unaware that they have 'kicked the bucket.'* (p.25) This allows them however, to desiccate and disintegrate, so there are no 'remains to / clutter up the place.' (pp.25/26)

The worlmas are the first in a steady line of creatures who seem to be 'made wrong,' but which represent *adaptive changes to Dustland's environmental circumstances*. All *Dustland's* inhabitants are comic heroes in Meeker's sense, seeking accommodations which allow them to modify their behaviour to agree with the environmental conditions, rather than dreaming of changing it.⁹⁰ Each new species is celebrated as a symbol of diversity, and *Dustland* provides a context in which the struggle for survival is extremely conspicuous, but in which the need for destructive aggression is minimised. Instead of favouring those red in tooth and claw, evolution instead selects for those new pioneers who are tenacious and durable, thriving against terrible odds by adapting and muddling through.

The ability to change and adapt is presented as much more than a defensive technique of physical survival in an endangered circumstance. It is a creative ethic, stemming instead from a 'natural' propensity to love life, the world, and all its possibilities. Gradually Hamilton introduces apparently alien species of extraordinary beings, all of which importantly survive by forming co-operative groups or units. Many, like the worlmas, seem

⁹⁰Meeker (1972)p.162

at first grotesque, and poignantly imprisoned by the desperate circumstances in which they are placed. But Hamilton consistently stresses that out of their apparent pain and suffering, and their dire struggle to adapt and live, emerges an uplifting strength and resilience. The tone of Dustland, despite its dire setting, is elative, and hugely comic.

In a central scene, for example, a female 'Slaker,' Bambnua, is imagined at an evolutionary point of transition. The grotesque Slakers are radical variations of Dustland's almost-human species. They have evolved so as to be capable of living in the dust, with small eyes, a neck which can be drawn in to bury the head, and a third leg, which can be jammed into the ground to stabilise the creature during tremendous 'Roller' dust-storms. Like most of Dustland's inhabitants, Slakers have developed the capacity to communicate without words, and can move in another dimension to deceive predators. The females have developed wings, which they use to hide and protect their young from the vicious males. Whereas the males use the third leg to fight and kick, the females attempt to use it to lift themselves from the ground, and to transcend the endless dust. Justice, using her marvellous psychic powers, enters the Bambnua's mind, allowing us insight into the creature's deepest longing and hopes. Inspired by contact with another powerful female and her own 'lust to live and a *ferocious desire to fly*' (p.119), the creature is lifted

She simply lifted her great wings and took off from the band of energy.
And soared.

On an immense silence of sky and light the Bambnua floated and glided...She gave off a deep and steady tone that vibrated with ageless feeling throughout the blue. It was a hawking swell. A Slaker song of praise, the first one ever.

"HAWHAW! YA! HAWA! HAWHAW! YAWHA! WAWA! WA!"

The Bambnua's elation, expressed in a mixture of song and laughter, characterises the mood of the whole novel, and celebrates the ability to adapt and change. The context of these evolutionary ideas overtly forms the imaginative core of the novel. Justice 'divines' that Slakers have evolved from humans (many alternative future branches of the human evolutionary 'bush' exist in Dustland). Hamilton uses future time to provide a wholly new context in which to present human nature from a new angle of perception, rather than focusing upon the predominantly social questions of the dystopian tradition. She does not evade the human propensity for aggression, observing that the male Slakers may well bring

about the extinction of their own species in the future. What matters, however, is that the female Slakers get the 'chance to see what they can do.' Because Hamilton's portrayal of the evolutionary mechanism so clearly tends to favour the ability (and willingness) to adapt and change, hope for the female remains a distinct possibility in the narrative's terms.

Hamilton importantly empowers the females and the most imaginative creatures in her story. Justice is the most potent member of First Unit, whose 'Watcher power' binds individuals into the group, but is crucially dependent upon the unit to express her psychic strength. Like Ged, she is engaged in a quest for wholeness. In the final novel, The Gathering, she leads various species out of Dustland, and discovers a domed area, in which a vast and intelligent machine, Colossus, attempts to recreate utopia for the 'humans' it serves. Colossus has neglected an important principle of life, however, because his utopian experiment is based upon an idea of perfection.

We do not have time for ordinary evolution...we do not waste time in making mistakes.(p.96)

First Unit teaches Colossus that life needs variety in order to be capable of change. As they have learned in Dustland, evolution relies upon imperfection and apparent 'mistakes.' Justice enables Colossus to 'see' that he needs 'Mal,' a part of himself which broke away when he began to develop artificial intelligence, and which has swept Dustland with 'ill-will and indifference' ever since, unbeknown to Colossus. As in Le Guin's novel, knowledge and acceptance of one's own imperfection is perceived to be empowering. But Hamilton chooses to depict the transformational aspects of these ideas in global, rather than individual terms. Once Mal is integrated with Colossus, 'change is bound to occur.' (p.157) This is not a simple blueprint for utopia, but is a process, a way of thinking.

Hamilton's narrative form consistently resists simple dichotomies of good and evil by focusing upon the necessity of ceaseless change. The benign ecological stasis which Le Guin asserts is replaced by a dominant and glorious sense of the uncertainty of life. Hamilton's children learn to accept and adapt to this principle. Although First Unit returns home to comfortable domesticity, and the final assurance of safety is clearly respected, each teenager

recognises that their lives are still a journey, having learned to accept the imminent physical and psychic changes of adolescence. Thomas, for example, returns from the far-future to realise he has the power to control his 'mean,' jealous thoughts

Well, each time I'm going to have to decide. There, now that's the truth. You can't expect me to be perfect every time. (p.196)

Hamilton's 'return-to-reality closure'⁹¹ does not abjure the magical secondary world. *Dustland* has 'proved' that Thomas's potential transformation is not a matter of a defeatist conformism to traditional cultural 'expectations' or taboos, but an inherent propensity to adapt one's behaviour to the (social) environment. Because all the children possess the complex capacity for congeniality *and* aggression this is seen as a question of moral choice, not externally imposed necessity. In this way the children struggle with themselves and their own feelings, and are not pitted against the social milieu, as they would be in the dystopian novel. Even though Thomas is a bitter and aggressive individual, his violence is not seen to stem from the refusal to be defeated, for, unlike Kitson, he is never subjected to a power that is greater than his own. Instead of celebrating the 'wild' urge to overthrow the status quo, which I argued in Chapter 5 was a characteristic of the dystopian novel, Hamilton uses Thomas's behaviour to call into question the traditional power and status invested in the male. In *Dustland*, like the male *Slakers*, he undeniably has the capacity to destroy the physically vulnerable, but he chooses not to. He is usually a comic and vulnerable figure himself, feebly resorting to bad language in contrast with the fluent and relaxed Justice.

Hamilton has presented evolution as a new basis for freedom: the need to be open to future change. The form of her trilogy, as well as its content, reflects this proposition. The 'facts' that the novel portrays constantly shift. 'Colossus machine', for example, is no simple narrative solution, not a riddle which can be unequivocally solved. It represents different things to the varying perceptions of the children who witness it. To Justice it is a coil, into which she herself fits. To Thomas it is a spaceship, to Dorian a huge computer, and to Levi, the most sensitive, it is

⁹¹Sarah Gilead 'Magic Abjured' in Hunt (1992) p.80

Like a sculpture that's the very best art...It's indescribable. But you know it's fine, that the very finest artist made it. (p147)

The truth of *Dustland*, and all its characters, is similarly unstable. In the second novel particularly events are seen through many eyes, and at first all is confusion and blurred focus. The four children all offer different explanations for what they see, and their ability to enter the minds of other creatures complicates the picture even further. The reader is left, unguided, to make sense of the secondary world, and no single narrator seems entirely trustworthy. Readers must, like the protagonists, strive to make sense of the patterns which *Dustland* presents and are left to draw their own analogies. There is no authoritative narrator to explain the meanings of the hordes of 'grims,' 'packens' and 'trips' which ceaselessly voyage across the endless waste, scavenging or hunting for scant nourishment. The reader is trusted to adapt to the book's reality, and, like the children, we soon know, by a process of imaginative osmosis, what is meant by a 'dark,' a 'roller,' 'Nolight' and 'Graylight.' The reader is expected to hear the multiple voices of the new world: to comprehend, for example, that 'tracing' is a form of communication, that italics are used to signal mind-talk, and that the Unit speaks collectively when the speaker refers to itself as 'i'. Moreover, characters are typically denoted by the nuances of their language, and frequently Hamilton refrains from overtly signalling their identity, so that we feel that we are actually inside the mind of someone else. Even the alien speech of the Slakers is dimly recognisable, because their language has evolved from our own. The reader learns their language by hearing it spoken, not by having it explained.

Whereas Le Guin's didacticism largely relies upon the reader's acceptance of Ged as an authorial mouthpiece, Hamilton offers no single interpretation of *Dustland*'s moral meaning. This uncertainty is crucial to Hamilton's didactic purpose, echoing the complex relativism of her own moral meaning. The form of her novel celebrates the refusal of story, and its medium, language, to remain stable and fixed. The cyborg, Celester, who strives to translate Colossus's idea of perfection into practice, is comically frustrated by what he considers to be the imperfections of language, complaining

"Your language falls over me as a net." (p80).

Instead of an attempt to restrict meaning and to guide the reader's interpretation, in Hamilton's own words: 'the final analysis is one of growing consciousness.'

CONCLUSION

I have established the existence of a coherent body of writing aimed at young people in which future fictional time is used to raise serious questions about the nature and development of human political and social institutions, much in the manner of 'adult' dystopian writing produced this century. I have argued that at deep imaginative levels the literature frequently demands that readers interrogate 'human nature' itself, and I have explored the evolutionary ideas which underpin the texts to demonstrate this. I work from the premise that dystopian writers are moved by a moral impulse to change the world, and seek to imply the possibility of ideological change. Futuristic fictions invariably depict a teenage protagonist learning about their world, and ultimately deciding to try to forge a better alternative. In both theme and intent, then, the works I consider depend upon didacticism.

By comparing dystopian writing for children with that produced for adults, I have shown that children's authors tend to compromise or modify the narrative techniques which typically characterise the parallel 'adult' literature of warning. I have highlighted the ways in which 'adult' admonitory novelists create plausible future scenarios by extrapolating the logical consequences of current trends, thus producing apparently prophetic fictions, which disguise the discontinuous or speculative nature of the imaginative world from the real present-day world. I have used an exploration of the evolutionary metaphor to highlight the discoveries that the classic dystopia makes. Huxley and Orwell both use their fictions to 'prove' that a static society is, by its very nature, deadly. They implicitly make the case for change and freedom by showing what its absence would mean: that is, the absolute extinction of the attractive qualities in human nature. Similarly Golding uses his fable to 'prove' the urgent need for a change in human nature. He too depicts a society which has lost the capacity to be continually transformable, and an inspection of the evolutionary debate within his work reveals a similar imaginative consistency. Like Huxley and Orwell, Golding strictly applies the logical consequences of his imaginative hypothesis, warning that a failure to change will result in the obliteration of the desirable qualities in human nature, making future change impossible.

Each 'adult' dystopian writer relies upon the inevitable defeat of the most fully human protagonist to underline the admonitory point that, if this future is permitted to come into existence, the results will be disastrous in human terms. The ironic closure of the unhappy ending is used to shock and provoke the reader into an examination of the social issues at stake, or to prompt a reappraisal of complacently accepted beliefs. Hope within the text is unequivocally denied to ensure a stock response (the utter rejection of the values of this future world) and to project the reader into an active role (inferring the need to attempt to change the world). The positive, hopeful elements are necessarily presented ironically and indirectly, and the reader is trusted to respond to irony and to extrapolate beyond the novel's close to envisage an alternative moral development.

In this way dystopian writing asks for more unguided independence of response than most children's writers traditionally accept. Firstly, many adults feel strongly that teenagers are at a vulnerable period in their lives, and so their literature should help them to develop a sense of positive moral choice by presenting them with clear-cut guidelines and positive affirmations.¹ I have shown that although teenage novelists have been strongly disposed to raise the searching questions implied by the dystopian imagination, they then have a tendency to produce what Hunt has termed

...'closed texts' which the skilled reader reads 'below capacity'. In other words, the writer has attempted to do all the work for the reader, to limit the possibilities of interpretation, to heavily guide understanding.²

The attempt to guide young readers toward a recognition of the need for moral idealism (and textual assertions about the means by which these may be achieved) manifests itself in various ways. I have documented the overwhelming tendency of children's writers to reject or at least to fundamentally compromise the unhappy resolutions employed by 'adult' dystopian writers. Many children's dystopias ultimately resist the limiting sense of imaginative closure which is the logical, predictable, plausible narrative outcome of the 'adult' dystopian scenario. Writers for the young frequently seek to supply a balancing, optimistic view within the narrative framework, rather than trusting the reader to respond to

¹ Iskander (1987) p.8

² Peter Hunt (1991) p.81

its ironic, indirect presentation. Often children's writers attempt to resolve any paradoxes which have emerged within their fiction, and seek to close down or mute possible readings which are at odds with a world view that is holistic and generally benign. Frequently an overt authorial voice emerges to control the narrative to heavily guide the reader's understanding.

I have suggested throughout that these tactics are often artistically damaging. The perceived need to supply a balancing view within the story often leads to an overly simple, schematic plot. Commonly a novel's reformist ideological explicitness is bought at the expense of imaginative depth. The narrator's guiding voice irritatingly intrudes upon the fictional world, for instance, or the rigid moral schematism undermines the plausibility of the preceding text, often lending a vacuously false air to the novel's denouement. I have used an exploration of the evolutionary ideas emerging in the children's texts to highlight the fundamental contradictions which characterise the children's dystopian novel. I have tried to show how the literature being produced for the young is repeatedly unable to achieve the profound levels of cohesion and wholeness of imaginative engagement which I regard as the important prerequisites for literature. I believe that the children's dystopia is usually characterised instead by ideological fracture and confusion.

I have attempted to show that, in contrast with 'adult' dystopian writing, conflicting ideological messages characteristically operate within the text. Often the narrative forms that teenage writers employ unconsciously undermine the book's intended, conscious surface ideology. For example, the 'subjoined' inorganic ending which supplements the plausible, realistic text, risks contradicting the book's admonitory function, implying that this future may not be undesirable after all. Repeatedly the physical survival of the moral teenage protagonist naively defies credibility, because it undermines or tries to reverse the inexorable narrative logic of the dystopia, in which the protagonist is pitted against insurmountable odds. I have shown how the plausible dystopia often gives way to 'escapist' fantasy techniques.

Furthermore, the tendency of an author to try to strictly control the text, and hence to limit the understandings the text makes available to a reader, means that texts become more 'monological' than 'dialogical'.³ The writer's effort to limit the opportunities for the reader's interaction may paradoxically contradict the surface objective of the literature, which is to make children think seriously about the future, encouraging them to make decisions and choices about the moral patterns which will shape the future. In other words, the form (or medium) of the children's dystopia often contradicts or undermines the pedagogic principles (or message) it appears to proffer. The author fails to trust the implied child reader to think, arranging the narrative in ways which seek to reduce the scope for the reader's own ideas and values to be brought into play. In short, there is often a radical disjunction between the pedagogical intentions and the literary features employed to express that intention. Writers appear to use future fictional time in order to achieve a certain fluidity of imaginative activity, yet tend to impose particular forms of authorial control in the way they structure their narratives. There is a curious irony in the fact that many children's writers seek to use a static mode of address in dystopian fictions, for dystopian fiction reveals that the static form is, by its very nature, deadly.

I have observed that children's writers' propensity to heavily guide understanding, attempting to diminish the need for the reader to do much work is particularly apparent in the imaginative resolutions to futuristic fiction. Commonly the writer structures the ending in an attempt to prevent the reader from responding 'wrongly' by mistakenly inferring that the dystopian future is really unavoidable. Writers for young people are extremely anxious that their implied reader does not respond with dejected despair by assuming that the fictional world is a prediction, not a hypothesis. To overcome this problem the writer often suggests an improving resolution to the story in the end. This optimism may, of course, actually contradict the darkest fears for the future which the author may genuinely believe to be true, and so the ending seems like a false compromise to the deep anxieties that the text has expressed on the level of its passive ideology.

³Hunt op.cit, p.81

I would like to draw attention, however, to the important consequences of the compromised ending in terms of the text's didacticism, and what it implies about the reader as ideologist. In texts like The Awakening Water, for example, the happy ending is used to strictly limit the possibilities of reader involvement, delivering a 'message' meant simply to be accepted by the 'taught.' The ultimate affirmation of moral idealism seems designed to act as a statement made to the reader, which in some way is static, received and incontrovertible. The form of this delivery assumes that the reader will unquestioningly converge on the traditional adolescent 'themes of adjustment, acceptance and understanding.'⁴ In this way many children's texts, to varying degrees, imply a reader who is willing to be told what to think, rather than one who wants to think for himself or herself. The recurrence of Epilogues which unashamedly instruct readers how to respond clearly reveals this tendency.

In other words, children's writers often fail to embody the principle of learning through participation. The Gradgrindian notion of the learner as a passive receptacle into which knowledge or ideas can readily be poured no longer accords with current ideas of valid educational theory, nor with our notions of the 'more-or-less-equal relationship between the generations which we now regard as ideal.'⁵ Recent research into student learning has indicated that there are two fairly distinct approaches to learning. 'Deep' or 'transformational' learning involves some restructuring of the study material to afford a better understanding of it in the learner's quest for meaning. 'Surface' or 'reproductive' learning is concerned simply with remembering facts, paying little attention to comprehension. According to Thomas and Bain, for example, in transformational learning

Ideas... are compared and contrasted, new examples and illustrations are developed for the underlying concepts, analogies are used to link new with existing knowledge, and attempts are made to link concepts across disparate disciplines and to everyday experience. In contrast, reproductive learning is closely bound by the terms and / structure of the original materials. Topics...tend to be treated separately, the details of each being assimilated in the form provided and with little extrapolation to analogous or contrasting concepts. Very often learning is construed as rote memorization, so that

⁴ Anne Scott MacLeod 'Robert Cormier and the Adolescent Novel' CLE 12, No.2 (1981) p.80

⁵ John Rowe Townsend 'Didacticism in Modern Dress' p. 33

there is little attempt to learn concepts as rules for generating or accepting novel instances.⁶ (pp.227/228)

The holistic nature of transformational learning clearly empowers learners to think independently for themselves, and to perceive the relevance of concepts and ideas in situations other than the specific learning context, whilst surface learning ensures that learners are entirely reliant on the 'teacher' to construct knowledge on their behalf.

Morgan⁷ has argued that deep learning is best achieved when the learner's own needs, interests and ideas are taken into account, and when the learner is empowered to contribute significantly to, and to exert some control over, the learning process. The learner's interaction with material is essential, and any attempt to simply transfer ideas, in the manner of rote learning, for example, is likely to be less effective (that is, less well-retained and less meaningful) than a process in which the learner is taken seriously, and is entrusted or encouraged to willingly and actively participate in that process. Transformation occurs in the learner's perceptions only when these conditions are observed. Morgan discusses the design of texts intended to be used for distance learning, observing that

Dialogue can be introduced into a text through the use of multiple voices...The aim is to go beyond the idea of the teaching text as an authoritative monologue... To develop the facility for dialogue requires a philosophy which recognises the responsibility and autonomy of the student in the learning process. (p.84)

Furthermore he observes that, despite 'closed' materials, learners can, and often do, shape their own learning, but for him texts are more valuable when they allow students access to 'ideas, skills and values which are relevant to their own needs and interests' and 'which they can use actively to understand, manage and change their social worlds.' (p.84) Here the educational concept of dialogue is closely allied to ideas about learners managing and changing their social worlds, which seems to me to have an immediate relevance to the nature of learning as it is conceived by the didactic texts I am considering.

⁶P.R. Thomas & J.D. Bain 'Contextual Dependence of Learning Approaches: the Effects of Assessments' *Human Learning* 3 (1984) pp.227-240.

⁷Alistair Morgan *Improving Your Students' Learning: Reflections on the Experience of Study* (London & Philadelphia, Kogan Page, 1993) pp. 80-85.

In narrative terms, the principles of transformational learning demand a new style of didacticism, which creates conditions for the reader to ask questions, to discover analyses, to imaginatively test out solutions. I would suggest that 'open' texts which allow the reader to exercise some influence upon the course of the narrative (that is, over what it may legitimately become for that reader), and which allow communication to flow in all directions, may be better able to empower the reader to think seriously, as opposed to those in which the writer seeks to provide solutions and thereby to prescribe or delegate thought. Readers can affect the course of the narrative by being allowed, or even required, to become active in the creation of meaning: in Hunt's terms, by doing some of the work. According to Hunt, texts which require a 'considerable interpretative effort by the reader, or which carry several interpretative possibilities'⁸ display a more 'open' rather than 'closed' narrative contract. The author uses the narrative to 'show' rather than 'tell.'⁹ In order to achieve their pedagogic purpose children's writers need to repose trust in the reader's intelligence, and to entrust choices, ideas and values to the reader. The tendency of the children's writer to progressively 'close' the text, to control the (hopeful) meaning, may, paradoxically, counteract the desire to allow the child reader to think radically when engaging with the futuristic book.

I have argued that 'adult' dystopian writers use the absolute closure of the ironic extinction of the hero to show rather than tell, because this form of imaginative closure demands that the reader extrapolates beyond the novel's close to see an extended moral development. I have discovered that extremely few texts for young readers unreservedly employ this device, however. It appears that not many teenage writers feel free to trust so clearly to the moral autonomy and intelligence of the implied reader. In fact, of the dystopian novels I have examined, perhaps only The Travelling Man's final tone is absolutely subdued. The negative, seemingly hopeless ironic conclusion, which features an anti-hero who is ultimately defeated in a striking violation of the conventions of adolescent literature, may actually reinforce the theme of responsibility and the need for urgent transformation. But in the books I have examined, only Will, Eva, Andra (and possibly Staig's Spud) literally die.

⁸Hunt op.cit. p.87

⁹ Hunt op.cit p.87. See also Alan Garner 'A Bit More Practice' in The Cool Web ed. M.Meek et al, (London :Bodley Head, 1977) p. 197: 'Didactic writing is unworked writing. It is my job to show, not tell.'

Few writers risk this more 'adult' form of closure, which, like the closure of the 'adult' dystopia, propels the reader into the need to rewrite the social world.

At the other extreme, and much more commonly, the tone of the adolescent novel's denouement, or at least the statements made by the aspiring youngsters, seem designed to suggest that, newly mature and personally transformed, the teenage heroes in the story leave to successfully create a better social world. I have argued that this often contradicts the preceding tone of the narrative, and frequently inadvertently implies a narrative rupture instead, in which the lack of resolution and the final uncertainty about the protagonists' ultimate fate implies their future failure, even their inevitable death.

I have observed that in most instances writers for young people strive to achieve a more 'open' or ambiguous resolution to the dystopian scenario, possibly in order to reduce the scope for self-contradiction within the preceding text. Often they resist presenting either the happy ending or the shocking reversal of the unhappy ending used by the 'adult' dystopia, seeking a middle way, in which either resolution may be reasonably implied by the unwritten conclusion of a *shepherd-like* ending. I have shown how many writers use the structure of the *bildungsroman*, rather than the closure of the return home or the ultimate failure, so that their protagonists are left at a point of transition, when they move forward into an uncertain narrative future.

In this way many writers fundamentally leave what follows up to the reader's imagination, deliberately propelling the reader into responsibility for the unwritten narrative conclusion. I have shown that a broad spectrum of *shepherd-like* resolutions exist. Some writers consciously subdue the tone of their endings, as in *Futuretrack 5*, and *The Ennead*, both of which are closed by the disillusioned teenage protagonists' recognition that their own futures are inevitably bleak, and that death, literally or metaphorically looms near. There is no return to a reassuring safety, nor can there be. The silence which follows seems designed to reinforce the unspeakable horror of the probable fact, conveying troubling material subliminally (or in some texts perhaps evading it, as the author's nerve fails). The emphasis on the *implied* ironic closure attempts to evoke the 'necessity of our acting to prevent such a possibility'

from becoming fact in the actual future.¹⁰ This narrative structure implies the moral autonomy of the reader, who must come to terms with the substance of the story and, by implication, the problems of social responsibility for our own futures. When uncompromising endings occur they are highly effective, overcoming many of the artistic and pedagogic difficulties of dystopian writing. They importantly allow the reader to think, and assume that the reader will accept the role of active ideologist and maker of meaning. As a result this ending seems most appropriate for a young-adult audience, and authors who use this strategy are arguably not writing 'for children' in any meaningful sense, not least because they fail to provide any emotional shelter within the text itself.

I have discovered that it is much more common for teenage writers to use the sherd-like ending to finally suggest the possibility of future narrative hope whilst muting, but still conveying, the speculative possibility of the future failure of the protagonist. At surface levels many writers ultimately choose to emphasise the point that the teenage protagonist has learnt to strive to change, rather than accept, the social world. Instead of final defeat, they seek to stress the growth and transformation of the protagonist, who becomes a new kind of hero(ine). Eventually, and against all the odds, the author allows the teenage protagonist some sort of return or new start, in which his/her psychic adjustment occurs, *allowing the individual to become a more fully formed, more 'mature' social entity*,¹¹ but one who importantly yearns to change the world and is empowered by his/her new moral knowledge to do so. The 'open' ending is used to take the book's ideological challenges more seriously, attempting to reduce the possibility of a rupture between the writer's pedagogical intention (allowing the reader to think) and the book's literary features. Yet as I have already suggested, very few novelists have successfully structured their preceding narratives to adequately or convincingly leave room for this more optimistic reading. The reader is therefore not cast ultimately in the role of active ideologist, but perceived primarily as a passive receptacle who will identify unquestioningly with the proposed optimistic possibility.

¹⁰ Higonnet (1987) p.50

¹¹ See Gilead op.cit. p.82

Throughout the thesis I have suggested that the reader (whose individual assumptions will actually be called into play, whether the author desires that or not) may well resist the stock hopeful response the author ultimately seeks to evoke, and respond instead to the book's preceding pessimistic undertones, which the writer seeks to progressively close. An exploration of the evolutionary ideas within the texts reveals that time and again these readings are actually rooted in the text's features, because the apparently moral protagonist is trapped, not so much by his/her own personal history in the book, but by a view of his/her species' history, which the dystopian form implies. In other words the passive ideology, revealed by an inspection of the evolutionary ideas, displays a second agenda which contradicts the surface ideology.

I have argued that very good dystopian novels for children do exist, however. These novels, as far as one can tell, are deliberately structured to make room for multiple interpretations throughout the text itself, rather than simply in the sherd-like ending. Rare novels, epitomised by Z for Zachariah, are thus able to achieve an imaginative coherence and the profound levels of cohesion and imaginative wholeness which overcome the artistic difficulties of the dystopian form. More importantly perhaps, Z for Zachariah consistently allows its reader to think, by maximising the reader's possibilities for interpretative interaction with text. The whole work achieves an openness which engages the reader in a mode of reading resembling 'finely tuned creative play'.¹² One reading does not negate or contradict another, because of the sophisticated construction of the whole work. This mode of telling allows the novelist to present the troubling truth honestly and without compromise, but importantly lets readers take only the 'lessons' or 'messages' for which they are emotionally and intellectually prepared. The reader is required to do at least half of the work, consistently supplying information and meaning which remains unstated by the author, and as a result no reader is forced to encounter material for which s/he is not yet ready. The open nature of the text's form allows it to become a literary 'onion',¹³ with the readers taking off as many layers as they are prepared or able to do. Each reader thus begins from where he/she is, not from where he/she might be assumed to be. This method leaves the reader free to choose whether to adopt a dark reading or a hopeful reading, (or a point

¹²Peter Hollindale 'Second Impression' p.8

¹³ Garner op.cit. p.197

anywhere on the spectrum between the two extremes). This tactic inherently allows the reader emotional shelter, fulfilling the deep sensitivity to audience required of the children's novelist. It also entrusts readers to make choices and to discover analyses at their own pace and in their own way. The reader is allowed to have an important effect on what the narrative will become for that reader, and communication flows in all directions. A text like Z for Zachariah is a rarity because it is ideologically open. O'Brien presents the attractive and unattractive aspects of competing ideological systems, and does not directly articulate a 'solution'. The open-ended nature of his text invites readers to question *all* forms of social organisation and human nature, and to scrutinise the ideals which underpin them. The reader is importantly assumed to be an active ideologist.

Z for Zachariah demonstrates that it is not impossible to achieve excellence in dystopian writing for the young, and that the needs of children and teenagers can be met within one work. The sophisticated structure of this novel is often overlooked by traditional criticism for children, however, probably because critics acting on behalf of the young often assume that children's books will operate (or be read) in certain fixed ways and demand a superficial level of thought, meaning that the critic, acting on behalf of the imagined child reader, looks for the literal, or most obvious readings. Research has shown that in fact often young people interpret meanings which are indirectly presented more sensitively than adults reading on their behalf, and that adults often underestimate 'real' children's capacity to respond in a sophisticated manner. Henke's small-scale 'real reader' research, for instance, has shown that in fact children respond to the hopeful possibilities indirectly presented by O'Brien's text, whereas adult critics usually only perceive its dark surface implications. Likewise, Iskander suggests that young readers recognise Cormier's implied meanings, of which adults reading on their behalf frequently remain unaware.¹⁴ Protective adults may be tempted to make superficial moral evaluations, expressing concern about the dark dystopian elements of admonitory fictions, which are interpreted literally. Adults may neglect to assess the book's literary form and fail to attend to implied meanings.

¹⁴Iskander (1987) p.9

As I have shown, the bulk of futuristic fiction for the young is largely premised upon an extremely hostile future environment. The massive scale of the forces against which the dystopian protagonist is pitted readily gives rise to adult concerns on behalf of the young people to whom it is addressed. Adults (whether authors or critics) may well fear that the dystopian scenario is too dangerous a form for children, because the consequences of a despairing 'misreading' made by a youngster are considered to be disastrous. In the related field of the 'new educations'¹⁵ Harber¹⁶ and Lister¹⁷ have both argued against what they call the 'pathological curriculum' which has generally emerged. Their arguments rest upon the fact that the 'new educators' have tended to emphasise the worst possibilities, aiming to warn young people about the painful truth and consequences of current human behaviours. As educators, Harber and Lister both suggest that this emphasis is misguided and tends to reduce the sense of playfulness and the open spirit of inquiry which is essential to a genuinely educational experience (that is, one which seeks to empower learners to become active agents of future change). Learning is best accomplished in an environment which is not hostile, but which is affirming and supportive. Also drawing upon educational theory (this time Paulo Freire's education for freedom) Biddle¹⁸ suggests that admonitory literature which seeks to 'argue' for change may so shock and distress the audience that the learner's response is hostile.

Given the strong desire to protect young readers, perhaps it is the case, then, that the content of the dystopian novel is not as conducive to the aims of children's writers as so many authors appear to believe. I would argue that there is a need to closely examine the forms that writers choose to work with. It may be the case that, in terms of the perceived needs of the generation to come, there is a higher value in the ambiguous utopia, rather than the dystopian novel. Indeed, although Z For Zachariah is typically viewed as a dystopia, perhaps it is better seen as an ambiguous utopia itself.

¹⁵ For example, peace education, global education, political education, education for citizenship and so on.

¹⁶ Clive Harber quoted by Alan Reid 'An Outsider's View of Political Education in England: Past, Present and Future' *Teaching Politics* 14, No.1 (Jan. 1985)p.10

¹⁷ Ian Lister 'The Problem of Peace Studies' Political Education Documentation Service, Educ. Dept., Univ. of York, p.5

¹⁸ M. Biddle 'Teaching and Learning for Change: the Plays of Edward Bond' unpublished doctoral dissertation, Univ. of York (1985)

My exploration of the few ambiguous utopias in Chapter 5 revealed that in theme and content these texts are premised very obviously upon change. They tend not to frame future-choices in terms of the mutually exclusive binary relationships which characterise dystopian writing. Their imagined worlds are more complex, displaying a tendency to regard binary relationships not as opposites, but as interesting complements, as a balanced and dynamic synthesis of polarities. An exploration of their evolutionary ideas reveals that in these texts, moral and physical developments are not made to compete. Concepts of good and evil are not imaginatively conceived in mutually exclusive terms, but are regarded as being mutually interdependent. Human imperfection is not naively ignored, but is placed in a larger perspective, which readily allows for two ways of viewing and valuing 'human nature.' Because evolution needs variety, it therefore values imperfection, and is presented as a process which does not necessarily favour a morally undesirable 'selfish gene,' but offers an imaginative scenario in which it is usually necessary to subjugate the self with the least damage to everyone.

In short, the entire narrative is premised upon a society in which nothing is static. This emphasises that the means are crucial, but there is no end, only future change. Dystopian writers discover implicitly that a just and peaceful society will always be in a state of evolution, continually transforming and transformable. They depict a static society to show what the elimination of change would mean. But the discoveries they make challenge the very basis upon which they work, because their meaning must be unequivocally received. Ambiguous utopias, on the other hand, argue for the acceptance of change by showing, explicitly, what change means. These far-future fictions, often using magic and the marvellous, emphasise their discontinuity -or transformation- from the primary world. The emphasis is on speculation, rather than prediction. Their advantage lies not so much in their ability to create a world which is generally benign, but one which the reader is likely to perceive as fluid and 'unreal.' This imaginative distancing means that, unlike the dystopian writer, there is less perceived danger in a potential 'misreading.' Because it has repudiated the primary impulse to warn, the ambiguous utopia is more free to celebrate and to offer a supportive future environment. They present positive affirmations, asking the reader to endorse, rather than reject the imaginative world. They present new angles of perception

within the text itself. As A Wizard of Earthsea demonstrates, it may well be equally 'closed' in the didactic form it adopts, and extremely serious in tone.

Hamilton's work, however, shows how the writer may use openness of form to allow the medium to become the message. Like Z for Zachariah, it empowers the reader to act in the narrative contract, by making a multiplicity of perspectives simultaneously available. Both novels use the narrative form to emphasise an ambiguity and relativity which accords with our current outlook on the world. The tone of Dustland, however, is more obviously elative and openly playful than that of O'Brien's work. It is, essentially, a comic vision, which is extremely rare in children's futuristic literature.

I wish to stress that I am not trying to polarise nor elevate the techniques of far-future fantasy over those of near-future realism. I certainly do not mean to imply that realism is confined to 'surfaces.' Indeed, Hamilton's work defies simplistic categorisation in terms of realism or fantasy. Both methods can allow the reader new insights into human culture, politics and the species' biological nature. I simply aim to assert that it is necessary to closely examine the forms with which futuristic writers choose to work, and to suggest that the more writers repose trust in readers' capacity to react imaginatively to a text and to think seriously about unstated meanings, the more likelihood there is that the literature will be capable of expanding the minds of the future generation. Writers may feel more comfortable with offering such openness in futuristic scenarios which are not entirely disastrous and which do not focus predominantly on an authorial attempt to warn against such a future.

If, and here I am revealing my personal ideology, it is accepted that children's books should be genuinely mind-expanding and liberating experiences, something more than simply the subject-matter must change. Perhaps innovation in form is required to achieve a new style of didacticism. As I have shown, experimental books are rarities. Talented writers, like O'Brien, can achieve their art within the dystopian framework, fashioning a new style of didacticism which fully assumes the idea of the writer as responsible educator, and does not demand an unthinking conformist consensus of opinion from its readership. It may be,

however, that less prophetic futuristic fictions more comfortably offer imaginative settings within which to more readily create a new didacticism. These possibilities have been curiously overlooked by writers who use futuristic fictional time to address a young audience.

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